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PIETRO BARDI

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DELL' OTTOCENTO

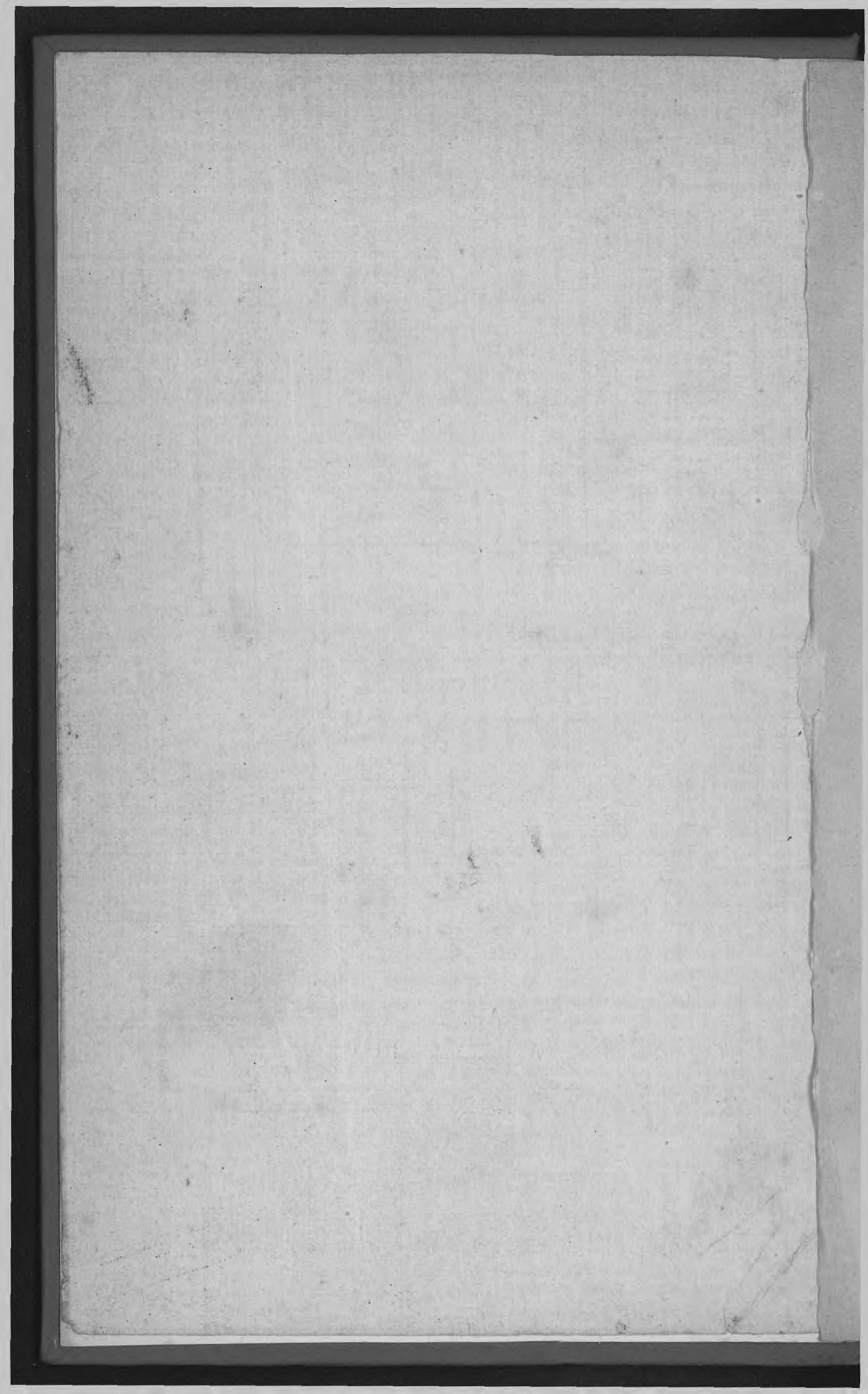


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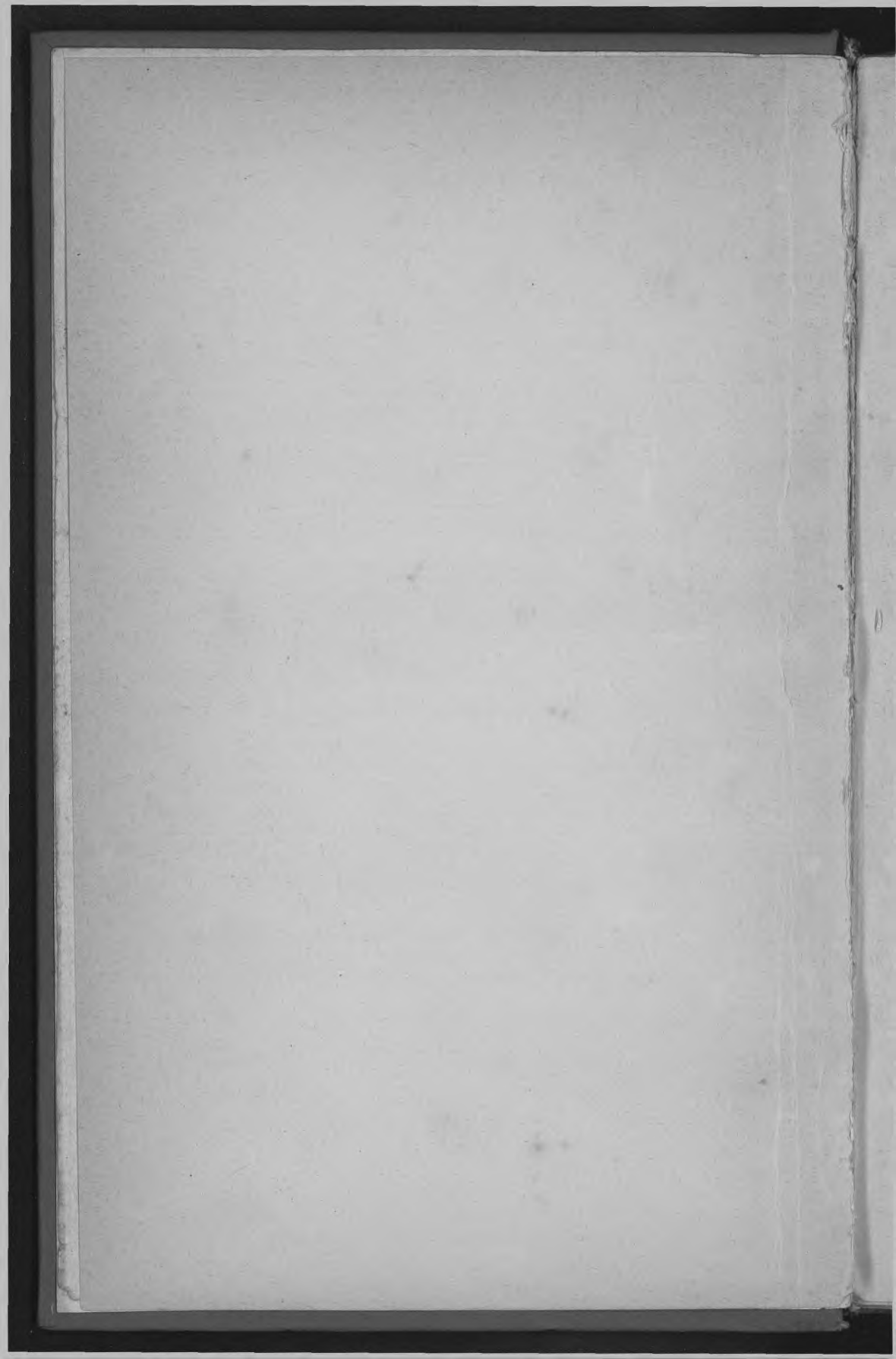
GIUS. LATERZA & FIGLI

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1912







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Lucca, A. Marchi, 1901.

A Trip into the Country (*versione della 'Scampagnata' di R. Fucini*). Lucca, A. Marchi, 1902.

The Dresden China Clock (*versione dell' 'Oriolo' di Ferdinando Martini*). Lucca, Marchi, 1903.

Grammatica inglese (con introduzione e note storiche). Bari, Laterza, 1909 (2^a ediz. 5^o migliaio).

Il Dottor Fausto (traduzione italiana dal Marlowe). Bari, Laterza, 1906.

At the Springs of Clitumnus (versione dell'ode di Giosue Carducci 'Alle Fonti del Clitumno'). Pavia, C. Rossetti, 1909.

PROF. PIETRO BARDI

DEL R. ISTITUTO TECNICO DI ROMA

SCRITTORI INGLESI
DELL' OTTOCENTO



BARI
GIUS. LATERZA & FIGLI

TIPOGRAFI-EDITORI-LIBRAI

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PROPRIETÀ LETTERARIA

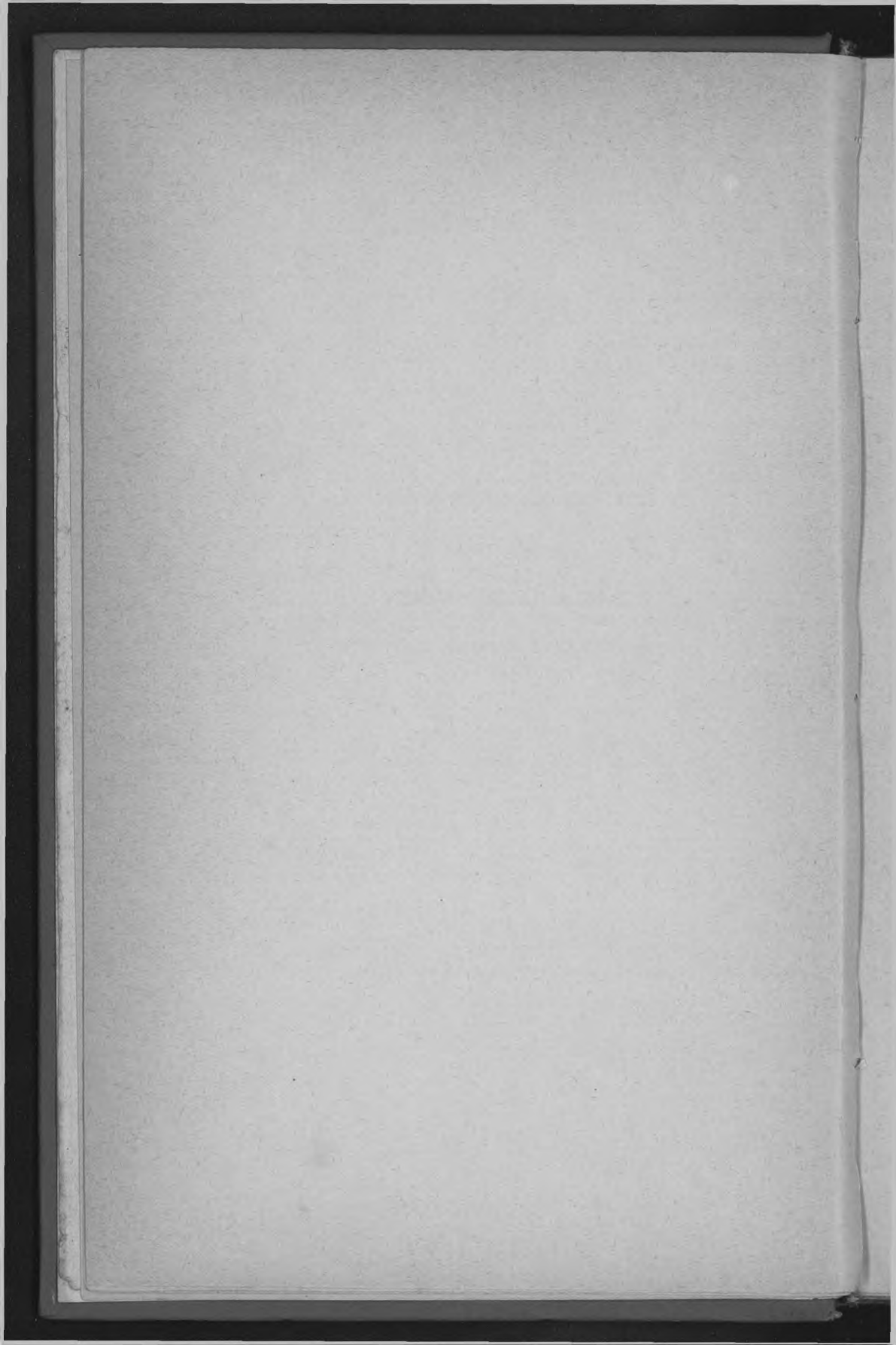
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IN MEMORIA DI MIA MADRE

NOBIL DONNA

SOFIA BARDI SFORZA

CON DOLORE E PERENNE RIMPIANTO



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INTRODUZIONE

La letteratura inglese, che anche il Carducci affermò essere « la più originale e la più libera e la più vera delle letterature moderne »¹ ebbe tre periodi sopra gli altri gloriosi: il primo, l'*età di Elisabetta*, è il secolo della rinascenza che, sotto lo splendore abbagliante del gran genio di Shakspeare, illumina gli ultimi anni del cinquecento e i primi del seicento (1560-1640); il secondo, l'*età di Anna*, l'aureo periodo classico svoltosi sotto l'influenza francese, comprende i primi decenni del settecento (1700-1740); l'ultimo, ricco e fecondo quanto il rinascimento, comincia sul declinare del settecento e arriva ai giorni nostri: vanta quindi oltre un secolo di non interrotta gloria. I critici inglesi dividono l'ottocento in tre momenti: l'*età di Wordsworth* (1798-1815); l'*età di Byron* (1815-1840); l'*età vittoriana* (1840-1900).

Mentre prima dell'ottocento la poesia fioriva ora in questa ora in quella nazione e le altre ne accoglievano e sviluppavano il seme, nei primi anni del secolo XIX crompono in tutta Europa vivaci i germi prepotenti di una rigogliosa rinascita che crescerà tra le tempeste. Sorge in tutte le letterature una scuola romantica, che combatte a rinnovare le forme e gli argomenti letterarii, e dopo molti contrasti riesce vittoriosa e si afferma per sempre. In ogni paese questo movimento scaturì da particolari tendenze e da speciali ragioni storiche, assumendo atteggiamenti e forme sue proprie, che sarebbe arduo voler ricondurre ad una comune origine. Nella

¹ *Prose*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1906, pag. 1355.

letteratura inglese il romanticismo germogliò e fiorì fin ne' suoi più antichi scrittori con involgimenti di poesia veramente moderna e nazionale, con ispirazione del tutto indipendente dai modelli antichi, e libero si mantenne per più secoli: nella lirica con i mille canti, pieni di freschezza e spontaneità, sgorgati da mille labbra alla volta nella ricca rinascenza elisabettiana; nella epica con il grandissimo Milton e con lo Spenser; nella drammatica popolare con il trionfo di Shakspeare, il più audace de' poeti romantici, il futuro idolo dei nuovi poeti tedeschi ed inglesi.¹ Classico fu il settecento, il secolo delle armoniche architetture di Pope e di Addison, l'età della critica, onde l'intelletto dominò e oppresse l'immaginazione: ma dall'eccesso nacque la reazione, e appunto in questo secolo si cominciano a intravedere i primi segni di un nuovo orientamento nel gusto. Primo tra tutti, lo Swift, con la sua *Battle of Books*, dà il primo colpo all'accademismo classico allora imperante e alla idolatria per Omero; il Richardson, il creatore del romanzo moderno, contribuisce potentemente a formare la 'sensibilità romantica';² il Gray, con la sua elegia, soave e melanconica, rivela ai Latini la poesia delle tombe e insegna all'Europa qual poetica malia emani da tutto ciò che è triste e indeterminato; l'Young, con i *Night Thoughts*, rinvigorisce (e forse fin troppo) questo senso di tristezza, mentre il Thomson, il poeta delle *Stagioni*, risveglia l'amore alla natura; Chatterton, il meraviglioso fanciullo spento nel fior della vita, con i *Rowley Poems* accende vivo l'entusiasmo per gli antichi canti medievali.³ Nel 1765 il Percy raccoglie le vecchie ballate scozzesi, *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*; e con questo volume, che divenne la bibbia dei nuovi poeti, e coi famosi *Ossian Poems* (1760) dello scozzese Macpherson si può dire s'inizii rapido il movimento romantico.

¹ Vedi A. FARINELLI, *Il Romanticismo in Germania*, Bari, Laterza, 1911 e JUSSEURAND, *Shakspeare en France*, Paris, Colin, 1898.

² Vedi E. GOSSE, *Eighteenth Century Literature*. Macmillan, 1909.

³ Per l'influenza esercitata da questi poeti sulla letteratura italiana vedi A. GRAY, *Anglomani e influsso inglese in Italia nel secolo XVIII*, Torino, Loescher, 1911.

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I canti di Ossian, che l'autore voleva far credere di un antico poeta gaelico, intessuti di raggi lunari e perfusi di una vaga melanconia, suggestivi di infiniti motivi lirici, fecero nascere il desiderio di una poesia che tornasse alla spontaneità e sincerità primitiva e si liberasse dall'ormai vecchio e trito ordine di espressioni e d'immagini. I canti di Ossian acuitarono la *rêverie* di J. J. Rousseau e prepararono il campo libero al Wordsworth, allo Scott, al Goethe, allo Chateaubriand. Il nuovo poeta romantico ama indugiarsi sull'orlo del mistero, e tenta in ogni suo verso di penetrare fino alle radici dell'essere e della vita; rompe le forme tradizionali, condanna l'orgoglio dell'intelligenza che pretende freddamente spiegare il mondo, e ritorna ai tempi delle ingenuie credenze, alla superstizione e alla leggenda. Col classicismo non scompare però il culto per i grandi capolavori dell'antichità, e noi vediamo Goethe, Shelley, Keats che, mentre approfondono inimitabili armonie in liriche romantiche, studiano i classici e si compenetrano della più pura poesia ellenica.



Il romanticismo inglese, sbocciato sotto il duplice impulso della rivoluzione francese ¹ che, scuotendo le menti degli uomini, ne rende normale lo stato di esaltazione, e della filosofia tedesca che fornisce armi per combattere l'orgoglio dell'intelletto, è formato da vari elementi talvolta in contraddizione tra di loro: ora è intensamente patriottico e nazionale; ora cerca nel passato la bellezza che manca al presente; ora invece guarda al futuro per scoprire quella bellezza che nel presente desidera invano; più spesso cerca nella natura, nella fragranza dei campi appena arati, o nel canto dell'allodola e dell'usignolo il piacere della vita. E invero la maggior gloria del romanticismo inglese sta, come osserva l'Hetford,² « nella intima, sottile, straordinariamente varia interpretazione

¹ Vedi E. DOWDEN, *The French Revolution and English Literature*. Kegan Paul, London, 1909.

² C. H. HETFORD, *The age of Wordsworth*. G. Bell, London, 1909.

del mondo della natura esterna e di quell'altro mondo che la comunione con la natura genera nella mente dell'uomo ». Questa riverente adorazione della natura distingue i poeti inglesi di questo periodo da quelli degli altri paesi, dove più era sviluppato l'elemento metafisico e mistico, come la Germania sotto l'influenza di Fichte e Schelling, e dove si dava maggior preminenza alle opere di sbrigliata fantasia, al medioevalismo, alla poesia allegorica e simbolica. Solo assai più tardi anche il romanticismo inglese giunse allo stesso stadio con i così detti preraffaelliti.

Ed ecco i precursori del romanticismo inglese. — William Cowper, poeta pieno di dolcezza e di pietà, che, abbandonando il manierismo della scuola di Pope, trae argomento di poesia dai più umili e semplici soggetti nei quali egli, fedele studioso dei particolari della vita, scorge il lato poetico. Il suo verso, elegante limpido e terso, tutto luce senza fiamma, prende una sensibilità e un accento personale da lungo tempo perduto, quando canta la sua campagna e le intime gioie del focolare. Giorgio Crabbe, forte e rude ingegno di poeta realista, senza grazia e sentimento, consacra i suoi versi a descrivere squallidi e sterili paesaggi, la nuda verità delle cose, i mali e le sofferenze dei poveri, preludendo al romanzo realistico moderno. Con lui fuggonò e scompaiono per sempre le ninfe e i pastori cantati negli armoniosi versi dei poeti settecenteschi. Anche la Scozia dà una fresca voce al coro poetico d'Inghilterra con Roberto Burns, il contadino di Ayrshire, che aggiunge alla poesia la forte nota della passione. Burns è impareggiabile scrittore di canzoni, che sgorgano ispirate e spontanee dal suo cuore commosso. Egli canta entusiasta l'umanità rinnovata dalla rivoluzione francese, e dà alla poesia tutto il profumo dei campi ch'egli coltiva: nelle sue liriche a Maria la Montanina si sentono i gridi di gioia e di dolore dell'ardente passione. Ma la nuova poesia inglese doveva trovare la sua più felice espressione nei canti di William Wordsworth e di Coleridge chiamati i poeti *Laghisti*, perchè dimoravano di preferenza nella pittoresca regione dei laghi inglesi.

Nel giugno del 1797 questi due poeti vivevano insieme sui colli deliziosi di Crewkerne nel Dorsetshire in vista del canale di Bristol, e là nelle lunghe passeggiate e conversazioni vennero immaginando e componendo il volumetto delle *Lyrical Ballads* che, pubblicato nel 1798, fu come il proclama della nuova rivoluzione poetica. L'intento dei *laghisti* fu di creare della poesia descrivendo le cose più semplici e apparentemente insignificanti nella lingua comune, dando però ad esse il colorito dell'immaginazione, che presta alle cose comuni il fascino della novità. Come vedemmo, l'Wordsworth era stato in questo preceduto da Cowper e da Crabbe; ma nessuno dei due si era completamente liberato dalla dizione poetica artificiosa del secolo precedente. Nella poesia di Wordsworth *The Solitary Reaper* si vede forse il più bell'esempio della rara magia dell'artista nell'adoperare le più semplici parole per tessere un velo che ha tutte le vibrazioni e il mistero di un cielo lunare. Wordsworth infuse altresì nel verso un ardente amore per le bellezze della natura, e nessuno più di lui seppe renderne le voci intime e sottili, nè senti ed esprime più profondamente l'affinità tra questa e l'uomo, nè udì nella natura la dolce e triste musica dell'anima umana. Il volume delle *Lyrical Ballads* conteneva dieciannove poesie di Wordsworth e quattro di Coleridge, che si era proposto di contribuirvi con poesia nella quale gl'incidenti e i personaggi fossero, almeno in parte, soprannaturali, ma presentati in modo che queste ombre dell'immaginazione avessero un intenso interesse umano e una sembianza di verità. E Coleridge scrisse il famoso *Ancient Mariner*, una delle più meravigliose creazioni della fantasia britannica, in cui si sente 'la prima nota, con la sua infinita promessa di eco, di una nuova poesia'.¹ Il verso di Coleridge, delicato e voluttuoso, ha tutti i colori dell'arcobaleno, e raggiunge talora, come nel bellissimo frammento *Kubla Khan*, uno splendore di suoni che pone il Coleridge primo fra i grandi melodisti della scuola romantica inglese.

¹ G. SAINTSBURY, *Nineteenth Century Literature*. Macmillan, London, 1908.

La poesia dei laghisti, come avviene quasi sempre per le opere veramente grandi e profondamente originali, non ebbe allora che un numero ristretto di lettori e ammiratori. Popolarissima fu invece la poesia di Walter Scott, scrittore di ballate medievali che fanno rivivere, con tutta la magia del passato, le antiche leggende e i canti dei trovatori della Scozia. La fama dello Scott come poeta è oggidì assai diminuita, perchè la sua poesia è piuttosto descrittiva che di sentimento e di pensiero. Sua vera gloria fu l'aver creato il romanzo storico, che sostituì a quello di osservazione diretta del settecento, e che lo rese popolarissimo anche sul continente, ove da lui s'ispirarono Alessandro Dumas, Victor Hugo e il nostro Manzoni.



La letteratura romantica inglese, che finora si era solo debolmente fatta eco del nuovo movimento di idee prodotte dalla rivoluzione francese, diviene con Byron rivoluzionaria ed europea. La sua poesia appassionata e veemente ispirò una miriade di poeti: l'impronta del suo spirito si sente in non pochi accenti di Heine e di Leopardi, di Lamartine e di Victor Hugo e soprattutto in Alfred De Musset. La sua personalità altiera e sarcastica, la sua vita scandalosa seguita da una morte eroica, contribuirono non poco alla popolarità della sua poesia, che, sebbene imperfetta e ineguale e raramente squisita, raggiunge talvolta una straordinaria potenza e un insolito splendore, come nella *Vision of Judgement* e nella grande satira sociale il *Don Juan*.

Poco conosciuto e apprezzato ai suoi tempi, ora il più appassionatamente amato di tutti i poeti inglesi, Percy Bysshe Shelley si rivelò nel 1820 con il grandioso dramma *Prometeo liberato*, la più moderna delle concezioni, ove si sente un ritorno allo stile e al genio ellenico. La melodia che vibra di continuo in questi versi, è cosa veramente divina: la lira poetica, come tocca da mani celesti, rende tutti i suoni, dall' 'oceano di splendore' alle dolci e flebili note che accarezzano l'orecchio come mormorii di magiche fontane.

Insieme con questo dramma comparvero alcune liriche, tra le quali la famosa *Ode to the West Wind*, che non hanno rivali nella letteratura universale. La poesia di Shelley, fluida e iridescente, par ravvolta in impalpabili vapori e dileguarsi in aerea melodia; è perfetta nello splendore e nella purezza delle sue immagini, perfetta nella divina dolcezza e infinita tenerezza di sentimento. Egli è probabilmente il poeta inglese che è meglio riuscito nella lirica pura, sia in quella di genere elaborato e antifonale, sia in quella che sgorga con onde di saliente musica direttamente dal cuore.¹

Altro grande poeta di questa seconda generazione romantica fu John Keats, il cui nome andrà sempre unito a quello di Shelley a causa del triste destino che li fece morire entrambi in Italia nel fiore della giovinezza e nel pieno fulgore del loro genio. Keats fu il primo di quel gruppo di poeti che, dimenticando quanto era stato scritto in versi inglesi dal 1625 in poi, s'ispirò agli scrittori elisabettiani e agl'italiani. A far rinascere il culto degli elisabettiani contribuì molto la pubblicazione di Charles Lamb, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* (1808), libro che fu letto con entusiasmo da parecchi giovani di grande promessa, Keats, Leigh Hunt, Proctor, Beddoes. Ma la poesia di Keats sbocciò spontanea dalla sua anima: ingenua, senza coltura, quasi senza insegnamento, era essa ellenica e pagana, ed egli è il poeta che spiritualizza in splendidi canti l'infinito desiderio della bellezza. L'universo non è bello abbastanza per lui; gli occorre una vita che sia un estasi continua, e melodie più dolci di quelle che l'orecchio umano possa udire, e canti che non abbiano mai fine, e un amore, e una bellezza che il tempo non possa appassire. La sua grande ode *On a Grecian Urn* fa comprendere questa sete di piaceri e di gioie sovrumane. Keats nel breve giro di tre anni, dal 1817 al 1820, arricchì la lirica inglese di parecchi capolavori che pongono questo umile figlio di uno stalliere vicino a Shakspeare e a Milton. Egli fu, dice il

¹ Cfr. E. Gosse, *Modern English Literature*, London, Heinemann, 1909.

Colvin,¹ lo spirito più shaksperiano che sia comparso dopo Shakspeare, ed esercitò grande influenza sui poeti dell'età Vittoriana, specialmente su Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti e Swinburne. La scuola romantica inglese ebbe anche un gruppo di geniali critici, quali il Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, De Quincey, l'autore della più melodiosa prosa poetica che sia stata scritta in Inghilterra, Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Walter Savage Landor, critico e poeta che s'inspirò ai classici e soprattutto a Pindaro e ad Eschilo. Nel 1825 il Macaulay, storico e poeta, segnò una nuova era nella critica col suo studio su *Milton* comparso nella *Edinburgh Review*, il primo esempio della moderna 'monografia'.

*
* * *

La letteratura inglese, dopo breve sosta, ebbe, quando salì al trono la regina Vittoria, un periodo di feconda vitalità nella poesia e più specialmente nella prosa.

Il più illustre poeta di questo periodo fu Alfredo Tennyson, che, osserva il Gosse,² sembra riassumere, in uno stile composito al quale diede una magia tutta sua, le più belle qualità della scuola che lo aveva preceduto. Studiò i fenomeni naturali come Wordsworth, le sue melodie son liquide e aeree quasi come quelle di Coleridge; e per splendore di colorito Keats appena lo supera. Agli elementi tolti ai suoi predecessori aggiunge un senso di bellezza decorativa debolmente arcaica e italiana, una finezza mai prima raggiunta nell'esecuzione del verso.

Grande poeta fu pure Roberto Browning, profondo e sottile nell'analisi psicologica, d'intuizione pronta e sicura, ma spesso oscuro e difficile a seguirsi perchè troppo rapido si svolge il suo pensiero. Il suo stile, se talora riesce un po' ruvido, sa anche essere squisitamente melodico. Ma assai più nota e ammirata del Browning fu sua moglie Elisabetta Barret, l'inspirata poetessa delle sofferenze umane, tutta

¹ SIDNEY COLVIN, *John Keats, English Men of Letters*. Macmillan, London, 1908.

² EDMUND GOSSE, *Modern English Literature*. Heinemann, London, 1909.

passione e sentimento, come nei famosi *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, che le fanno volentieri perdonare i difetti di forma. Gloria maggiore dell'età vittoriana fu il romanzo, che non mai come allora ebbe tanti cultori di genio. Primo fra questi certamente Dickens, che risuscitò con i *Pickwick Papers* l'antico tipo nazionale di romanzo pieno di vigor comico e scritto con vena di inesauribile allegria.

Mentre Dickens ritrae ne' suoi romanzi le classi povere o della media borghesia, il suo grande rivale William Makepeace Thackeray dipinge mirabilmente con fine 'humour' satirico l'alta società inglese. Le donne hanno non poca parte alla gloria del romanzo nell'ottocento: Carlotta Brontë emerge per intensità di sentimento e per potente realismo. George Eliot, fine osservatrice della natura umana, diede due capolavori al romanzo inglese: *Adam Bede*, quadro fresco e fedele della vita rustica inglese, e *The Mill on the Floss*. Ai giorni nostri il romanzo sèguita ad esser coltivato con buon successo da George Meredith, ingegno sottile e nervoso; da Thomas Hardy, forte scrittore che ritrae specialmente la vita dei campi, da Robert Louis Stevenson, dalla prosa soave tersa e melodiosa, che nel suo volume *An Inland Voyage* ricorda l' 'humour' del famoso *Sentimental Journey* di Sterne, da Rudyard Kipling, che ci dà vive e fresche pitture della caratteristica vita delle colonie inglesi.

Tra i prosatori che hanno creato e diretto le più grandi correnti di pensiero di questa età è Tommaso Carlyle, apostolo della forza, voce la più forte dei tempi nuovi, il quale volle sollevare la mente umana a grandi ideali, creatore di una prosa lirica a scatti, talvolta rude e quasi selvaggia, ma sempre potente ed efficace. John Ruskin, l'apostolo della bellezza, un virtuoso dello stile, la cui maestria non è mai stata superata, spiega in pagine sontuose i quadri della natura e i monumenti dell'arte, mentre si adira contro l'industrialismo invadente che accumula bruttezze sulla faccia della terra. Matthew Arnold, poeta e prosatore, combatte nei suoi scritti il pregiudizio, l'ignoranza e l'orgoglio nazionale degli Inglesi, sforzandosi di insegnare ai suoi concittadini lo spirito di finezza e il gusto dei Latini.

Il regno della regina Vittoria ebbe anche un gruppo di valenti storici: oltre il Macaulay e il Carlyle, James Anthony Froude, smagliante e profondo autore della *History of England*, Edward Freeman, che scrisse la *History of the Norman Conquest*, Richard Green, che unì la pittoricità descrittiva di Froude all'accuratezza e ampiezza di vedute del Freeman.

Nella seconda metà del secolo (1865-70) s'iniziò il movimento preraffaellita, che, dall'arte passando alla letteratura, voleva tornare alla poesia ingenua dei primitivi, alle ballate e alla romanza. Sullo stile dei preraffaelliti ebbe grande influenza un volumetto pubblicato nel 1859 da Edward Fitzgerald, la parafrasi del *Rubayat* del poeta persiano Omar Khayam. La fresca melodia di questo canto orientale, la sua particolare fragranza furono gli elementi più originali introdotti nel verso inglese negli ultimi quarant'anni e diedero un fascino tutto proprio alla poesia dei preraffaelliti. Anima di questa rivoluzione in arte e in poesia furono Dante Gabriele Rossetti, poeta e pittore, sua sorella Cristina Rossetti, William Morris e il grande poeta da poco scomparso, Carlo Algernon Swinburne il più meraviglioso creatore di armonie e melodie, il legittimo continuatore della gloriosa tradizione poetica di Shelley e di Keats,

*All the charm of all the Muses
often flowering in a lonely word.*¹

¹ A. TENNYSON, *Ode to Virgil*, in WARD, *English Poets*. Macmillan, 1907.

WILLIAM COWPER

1731-1800

William Cowper, dolce e melanconico poeta vivo ancora nella bella tela del Lawrence, nacque a Great Berkhamstead nella contea di Hertford nel 1731 dal reverendo Cowper, cappellano di Giorgio II. A sei anni perdette la madre e fu mandato in collegio, dove, di carattere timido ed estremamente sensibile, soffrì molto per la brutalità dei compagni. Dal collegio passò alla *Westminster School* e più tardi all'*Inner Temple*, studente di legge. Nel 1756 gli morì il padre e andò a dimorare presso uno zio, in casa del quale s'innamorò di sua cugina Teodora. Sventura volle che non potesse sposarla per l'opposizione della famiglia; chè più rosea sarebbe trascorsa la vita del poeta! Lo zio gli procurò il posto di *Clerk of the Journals* nella Camera dei Lordi, con l'obbligo però di superare un esame pubblico. Per sei mesi tentò di prepararsi a questa prova; ma leggeva senza capire, chè una febbre nervosa lo consumava: « in queste condizioni mi prendeva talvolta tale impeto di collera, quando mi trovavo solo nelle mie stanze, che gridavo e maledicevo l'ora della mia nascita, levando gli occhi al cielo non in atto di preghiera, ma con un sentimento infernale di odio e di rimprovero contro il mio Creatore ». Proclive alla melanconia fin da bambino, fu preso da una cupa disperazione, da gravi accessi di ipocondria, da quell'orribile malattia dell'anima che doveva poi tormentarlo per tutta la vita. In un momento di maggiore sconforto tentò perfino di uccidersi, e dovette essere ricoverato in una casa di salute. Dopo parecchi mesi gli tornò la ragione, ma rimase triste, scoraggiato: cercò distrazione nella vita campestre, nel giardinaggio, nella compagnia dei suoi animali prediletti, che

poi cantò ne' suoi versi con tanta affettuosa bontà. A Huntingdon ebbe la fortuna di stringere amicizia con Mrs. Unwin, la pia signora che nutrì per l'infelice poeta affetto veramente materno. Consigliato da lei, scrisse una serie di poesie che intitolò *Table Talk*. A Olney conobbe pure Lady Austin, signora molto colta e d'ingegno, che, per distrarre il poeta dalla melanconia che l'opprimeva, gli suggerì quale soggetto di poesia il suo sofà; nacque così *The Task* (Il Compito), poema in cui il Cowper esprime le sue tranquille emozioni, le gioie di una quieta passeggiata in estate o delle ore trascorse la sera al focolare, quando fuori imperversava l'inverno:

« *Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in* ».

Partita Lady Austin, Cowper ebbe a compagna sua cugina Lady Hesketh; e furon questi gli anni suoi più felici. Erra il poeta sulle rive dell'Ouse, e guarda e sogna: una rosa, un filare di pioppi che stormisce al vento, una fresca contadina col paniere sotto il braccio, un ruscelletto che lambisce gorgogliando le sponde di un prato fiorito bastano a riempirgli l'animo di poesia. Torna a casa, al suo piccolo nido, la cui porta si apre su di un giardino pieno di garofani, di rose e di caprifogli, e scrive. Compose così in quegli anni deliziose poesie su piccoli avvenimenti domestici, e i bellissimi versi *On his Mother's Picture*, e il sonetto e i versi famosi *To Mary Unwin*. Il fascino della sua anima mite e gentile rivive soprattutto nelle lettere che scrisse agli amici, delle più belle che possedga la letteratura inglese. Intanto le gentili compagne che avevano allietato i giorni dell'infelice poeta scomparvero. Lady Hesketh annalò e dovette partire per Bath; Mrs. Unwin colpita da paralisi poco dopo morì. Le sopravvisse il poeta, ma ogni giorno più dense scendevano le tenebre nella sua mente malata. Scrisse ancora dei versi, tra gli altri la

tragica lirica che risonò come angoscioso grido dei suoi ultimi giorni, in cui paragona il suo destino a quello di un marinaio che, caduto dal bastimento e travolto dalle onde, lotta invano per salvarsi:

*« Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Washed headlong from on board;
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left...*

*No voice divine the storm allay'd,
No light propitious shone,
When snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in blacker gulfs than he ».*

Cowper morì a Dereham nel 1800 a 69 anni. Fu poeta e artista veramente originale. Con lui la poesia si fa cosa viva, il pensiero diviene fluido, il vocabolario si allarga per accogliere anche le parole della vita di oggi giorno. Nelle sue liriche, ove mostra tutta la sua grazia e quel fine sentimento religioso che dopo Milton non era più apparso nella poesia inglese, non si leggono già parole, come nei poeti del Settecento, ma si sentono emozioni profondamente e sinceramente provate. Egli fu il continuatore di Thomson e il vero precursore di Wordsworth.

THE POPLAR FIELD

The poplars are fell'd;¹ farewell to the shade
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade;
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves
Nor Ouse² on his bosom their image receives.

Twelve years have elapsed since I first took a view
Of my favourite field, and the bank where they grew:
And now in the grass behold they are laid,
And the tree is my seat that once lent me a shade!

The blackbird has fled to another retreat
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat;
And the scene where his melody charm'd me before
Resounds with his sweet-flowing ditty no more.

My fugitive years are all hasting away,
And I must ere long lie as lowly as they,
With a turf on my breast and a stone at my head,
Ere another such grove shall arise in its stead.

The change both my heart and my fancy employs;
I reflect on the frailty of man and his joys:
Short-lived as we are, yet our pleasures, we see
Have a still shorter date³ and die sooner than we.

¹ *To fell* = abbattere, tagliare.

² *Ouse*, fiume nel sud dell'Inghilterra che si getta nel golfo di Wash.

³ Han tratto ancor più corto.

TO MARY UNWIN ¹

The twentieth year is well-nigh past
Since first our sky was overcast;²
Ah would that this might be the last!
My Mary!

Thy spirits have a fainter flow,³
I see thèe daily weaker grow —
'Twas my distress that brought thee low,
My Mary!

Thy needles, once a shining store,⁴
For my sake restless heretofore,
Now rust disused, and shine no more;
My Mary! •

For though thou gladly wouldst fulfil
The same kind office for me still,
Thy sight now seconds not thy will,
My Mary!

¹ Il poeta si era ritirato a vivere presso Mrs. Unwin che lo curò affettuosamente durante la sua malattia. Questa signora fu colpita da paralisi e il poeta le dedicò questi bellissimi versi a proposito dei quali il prof. Palgrave scrive: «Il Cowper unisce alla squisitezza nel giro del pensiero una intensità di patetica tenerezza, peculiare alla sua natura amante e ingenua. Cowper è il nostro più grande maestro nel semplice patetico».

² Il poeta ebbe un accesso di pazzia.

³ La tua vivacità, la tua forza scema di vigore.

⁴ I tuoi aghi già lucidi.

But well thou play'st the housewife's part,
And all thy threads with magic art
Have wound themselves about this heart,
My Mary!

Thy indistinct expressions seem
Like language utter'd in a dream;
Yet me they charm, whate'er the theme,
My Mary!

Thy silver locks, once auburn¹ bright,
Are still more lovely in my sight
Than golden beams of orient light,
My Mary!

For could I view nor them nor thee,
What sight worth seeing could I see?
The sun would rise in vain for me,
My Mary!

Partakers of thy sad decline
Thy hands their little force resign;
Yet, gently prest, press gently mine,
My Mary!

Such feebleness of limbs thou prov'st
That now at every step thou mov'st
Upheld by two; yet still thou lov'st,
My Mary!

And still to love, though prest with ill,
In wintry age to feel no chill,
With me is to be lovely still,
My Mary!

¹ Biondi.

But oh! by constant heed I know
 How oft the sadness that I show ¹
 Transforms thy smiles to looks of woe,
 My Mary!

And should my future lot be cast
 With much resemblance of the past,
 Thy worn-out heart will break at last,
 My Mary!

THE SHRUBBERY ²

O happy shades! to me unblest! ³
 Friendly to peace, but not to me!
 How ill the scene that offers rest,
 And heart that cannot rest, agree!

This glassy stream, that spreading ⁴ pine,
 Those alders ⁵ quivering to the breeze,
 Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,
 And please, if anything could please.

But fix'd unalterable Care ⁶
 Foregoes ⁷ not what she feels within,
 Shows the same sadness everywhere,
 And slights the season and the scene.

¹ Il poeta allude ai momenti di disperazione religiosa cui andava soggetto.

² *Shrub* è pianta bassa con molti rami; *shrubbery* è un insieme di queste piante: boschetto.

³ *Unblest* = senza felicità, tristi.

⁴ Dagli ampi rami.

⁵ Ontani.

⁶ Dolore, angoscia.

⁷ *To forego* = abbandonare, lasciare.

For all that pleased in wood or lawn
 While Peace possess'd these silent bowers,¹
 Her animating smile withdrawn,
 Has lost its beauties and its powers.

The saint or moralist should tread
 This moss-grown alley, musing, slow,
 They seek like me the secret shade,
 But not, like me, to nourish woe!

Me, fruitful scenes and prospect waste²
 Alike admonish not to roam;
 These tell me of enjoyments past,
 And those of sorrows yet to come.

TO MRS. KING

April 11th 1788.

Dear Madam,

The melancholy that I have mentioned, and concerning which you are so kind as to enquire, is of a kind, so far as I know, peculiar to myself. It does not at all affect the operations of my mind on any subject to which I can attach it, whether serious or ludicrous, or whatsoever it may be; for which reason I am almost always employed either in reading or writing when I am not in conversation. A vacant hour is my abhorrence; because when I am not occupied, I suffer under the influence of my unhappy temperament. I thank you for your recommendation of a medicine for which you have

¹ *Bower* (dalla radice A. S *bāan* = dimorare) vuol dire dimora rustica o luogo coperto con rami e foglie in un giardino; in poesia è usato per luogo o ritrovo gradito.

² Ridenti paesaggi o tristi lande.

received benefit yourself; but there is hardly any thing that I have not proved, however beneficent may have been found by others, in my own case utterly useless. I have, therefore, long since bid adieu to all hope from human means, -- the means excepted of perpetual employment.

I will not say that we shall never meet, because it is not for a creature, who knows not what shall be to-morrow, to assert anything positively concerning the future. Things more unlikely I have yet seen brought to pass, and things which, if I had expressed myself of them at all, I should have said were impossible. But being respectively circumstanced as we are, there seems no present probability of it. You speak of insuperable hindrances; and I have also hindrances that would be equally difficult to surmount. One is, that I never ride, that I am not able to perform a journey on foot, and that chaises do not roll within the sphere of that economy which my circumstances oblige me to observe. If this were not of itself sufficient to excuse me, when I decline so obliging an invitation as yours, I could mention yet other obstacles. But to what end? One impracticability makes as effectual a barrier as a thousand. It will be otherwise in other worlds. Either we shall not bear about us a body, or it will be more easily transportable than this. In the mean time, by the help of the post, strangers to each other may cease to be such, as you and I have already begun to experience.

I have just discovered that I have written to you on paper so transparent, that it will hardly keep the contents a secret. Excuse the mistake, and believe me, dear Madam, with my respects to Mr. King

affectionately yours

W. C.

NATURE IN THE COUNTRY

(Letter to the Rev. J. Newton)

I sit with all the windows and the door wide open, and am regaled with the scent of every flower, in a garden as full of flowers, as I have known how to make it. We keep no bees; but if I lived in a hive, I should hardly hear more of their music. All the bees in the neighbourhood resort to a bed of mignonette opposite to the window, and pay me for the honey they get out of it by a hum, which, though rather monotonous, is as agreeable to my ear as the whistling of my linnets. All the sounds that Nature utters are delightful, at least in this country. I should not perhaps find the roaring of lions in Africa, or of bears in Russia, very pleasing: but I know no beast in England whose voice I do not account musical, save and except always the braying of an ass. The notes of all our birds and fowls please me without one exception. I should not indeed think of keeping a goose in a cage, that I might hang him up in the parlour for the sake of his melody; but a goose upon a common, or in a farm-yard, is no bad performer: and as to insects, if the black beetle, and beetles indeed of all hues, will keep out of my way, I have no objection to any of the rest; on the contrary, in whatever key they sing, from the gnat's fine treble⁴ to the bass of the humble bee, I admire them all.

⁴ Dal bel suono acuto della zanzaretta.

ROBERTO BURNS

1759-1796

Roberto Burns, il più grande poeta della Scozia e uno dei maggiori lirici inglesi, nacque ad Alloway nella contea di Ayr, in una misera capanna da povera famiglia di contadini. Il padre, Guglielmo Burns, teneva in affitto un podere, ma la terra rendeva poco e la numerosa famiglia viveva di stenti, tormentata sempre dalle richieste di denaro di un « ribaldo di fattore » che minacciava la prigione dei debitori. Quale fosse allora la vita del futuro poeta, dice egli stesso: « La cupa tristezza di un eremita con l'incessante fatica di un galeotto: ecco la vita che condussi fino al mio sedicesimo anno ». Nonostante la povertà e il duro lavoro dei campi, Burns non mancò d'istruirsi. Suo padre, come quasi tutti i contadini scozzesi, era un appassionato lettore e durante le ore del pasto, i soli momenti di riposo della famiglia, egli e i figli leggevano di continuo; Roberto poté così conoscere la famosa raccolta di canti popolari scozzesi del Ramsay, i migliori scrittori inglesi; apprese il francese, la matematica e un po' di latino. Nel 1784 morì il padre, esaurito dalle fatiche e dai dolori, lasciando la famiglia nella più nuda miseria. Burns si trasferì con i suoi a Mossgiel, dove prese in affitto un altro podere; ma gli affari seguirono ad andare male, e il poeta, scoraggiato, stanco della lotta impari, si abbandonò alla dissipazione, al bere e agli amori. Eppure durante quei tristissimi anni della sua vita, dal 1784 al 1786, venne maturandosi il suo genio di poeta,

e compose le sue più belle poesie. Come germogliasse in lui il desiderio di scriver versi, lo racconta egli stesso in una notizia sulla sua vita scritta per l'amico Dr. Moore: « Nel mio quindicesimo autunno la mia compagna nei lavori della raccolta era una vezzosa creatura, più giovane di un anno di me. In poco tempo essa inconsciamente m'iniziò a quella deliziosa passione che, nonostante gli aspri disinganni, il freno della prudenza e il tarlo della filosofia, io credo la prima delle umane gioie, la nostra più dolce benedizione quaggiù... Fra le altre qualità che ispiravano amore, essa cantava dolcemente: ed era appunto al suo ritornello che io cercavo e tentavo di accompagnare le mie rime ». Scrisse così i famosi suoi canti nel nativo dialetto scozzese, che usò con insuperata maestria. Purtroppo non tutti (anche tra gl'inglesi) sono in grado di comprendere il dialetto del Burns, sebbene oggidì si abbia una certa familiarità con lo scozzese per opera dei romanzi dello Stevenson, di Barrie, e del Crockett. Men felice è il Burns quando scrive in inglese, che pur seppe usare con grande efficacia come nei versi bellissimi *To Mary in Heaven*. Intanto l'azienda agricola del Burns andava di male in peggio, tanto che risolvette di emigrare nella Giamaica. Per raggranellare i denari necessari al viaggio, pensò di pubblicare le poesie che era venuto a mano a mano componendo, e che erano già conosciute e ammirate da' suoi compaesani. Apparve così la famosa edizione di Kilmarnock nel luglio del 1786, che lo rivelò uno dei maggiori poeti d'Inghilterra. Incoraggiato da questo ottimo successo (la prima edizione fu esaurita in un mese) il poeta andò a Edimburgo, ove gli furono aperti i salotti del mondo elegante e colto. Ma fu breve il sereno; s'accorse ben presto quanto effimeri fossero gli entusiasmi del pubblico, e se ne tornò disilluso alla vita dei campi, stabilendosi a Ellisland in Dumfriesshire con l'antica fiamma Jean Armour, divenuta ora sua moglie. Nel 1791, per assicurarsi almeno il pane, dovette accettare il meschino ufficio di doganiere. Anche a Dumfries il Burns non si trovò bene; le sue opinioni politiche liberissime gli creavano continui fastidi, e non passò molto tempo che si

abbandonò di nuovo all'abuso dell'alcool: a soli trentasette anni era un uomo finito. Morì, nel pieno vigore del suo genio poetico, di una febbre presa una sera d'inverno che, stordito dal vino, s'addormentò sulla via.

Roberto Burns è il poeta dei tempi nuovi: spirito indipendente, si accende di entusiasmo per le idee rivoluzionarie di Francia; odia i ricchi e i potenti, e si fa interprete dei sentimenti della classe bassa del popolo, come nei *Jolly Beggars* (gli allegri mendicanti dell'osteria di Poosie Nansie) potente rappresentazione drammatica piena di forza realistica quasi Shaksperiana, e nella *Holy Fair* (La Fiera Santa), satira feroce del clero di quei giorni. Nel *Cotter's Saturday Night* (Il sabato sera del contadino) dipinge invece con amorevoli tocchi la capanna di suo padre, cingendo di un'aureola imperitura di poesia l'umile e laboriosa vita del contadino. Ma l'opera sua immortale sono i canti (*songs*), insuperabili per spontaneità e sincerità di sentimento. « Non vi è, scrive il Craik,¹ poesia più vera in nessuna lingua o in nessuna forma. Ma è poesia del cuore più che della testa o dell'immaginazione. I canti del Burns non somigliano agli squisiti frammenti lirici che Shakespeare e anche Beaumont e Fletcher hanno sparso in alcuni loro drammi, rallegrando il movimento della scena come le voci degli uccelli nelle siepi o la vista e l'odore dei fiori selvatici sbocciati ai lati della strada, rallegrano il cammino del viandante. Essi non sono mai esercizi dell'ingegno, ma sempre espressioni della passione, semplici e spontanei come uno scoppio di risa o di pianto. Ciò che essi hanno di fantasia o di melodia, nasce da commozione reale, è semplicemente l'espressione naturale dei sentimenti del poeta in quel momento, che cercano e trovano uno sfogo nella musica delle parole. Dacchè l'ardente Saffo amò e cantò nelle antiche isole della Grecia, non molta poesia è stata prodotta così profondamente tenera come alcuni dei migliori di questi canti. I più famosi sono *Ae Fond Kiss*, *O wert thou in the*

¹ G. CRAIK, *History of the English Language and Literature*, vol. II, pag. 220.

could Blast, Of a' the Airts the Wind can Blaw, There was a Lass and she was Fair, meraviglioso questo per delicatezza di sentimento e per la bellezza di alcune metafore:

*As in the bosom o' the stream,
The moonbeam dwells at dewy e'en;
So trembling, pure was tender love
Within the breast o' bonny Jean.*

Questi canti fanno del Burns un poeta universale e, come ben disse Wordsworth nella bella trenodia,

*Deep in the general heart of man
His power survives.*

HIGHLAND MARY ¹

Ye banks and braes ² and streams around
The castle o' Montgomery,
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,
Your waters never drumlie! ³

There simmer ⁴ first unfauld her robes,
And there the langest tarry;
For there I took the last fareweel
O' my sweet Highland Mary.

How sweetly bloom'd the gay green birk, ⁵
How rich the hawthorn's blossom,
As underneath their fragrant shade
I clasp'd her to my bosom!

The golden hours on angel wings
Flew o'er me and my dearie;
For dear to me as light and life
Was my sweet Highland Mary,

Wi' ⁶ mony a vow and lock'd embrace
Our parting was fu' tender;
And pledging aft ⁷ to meet again,
We tore oursels asunder;

¹ Mary Campbell, amata dal poeta.

² Poggi e colline.

³ *Drumlie* = torbide.

⁴ *Summer*.

⁵ *Birk* = betulla.

⁶ *With*.

⁷ *Aft* = often.

But, oh! fell Death's untimely frost
 That nipt my flower sae ¹ early!
 Now green's the sod, and could's ² the clay,
 That wraps my Highland Mary!

O pale, pale now, those rosy lips,
 I aft hae ³ kissed sae fondly!
 And closed for aye the sparkling glance
 That dwelt on me sae kindly:

And mouldering now in silent dust
 That heart that lo'ed me dearly!
 But still within my bosom's core
 Shall live my Highland Mary.

TO MARY IN HEAVEN ⁴

Thou lingering ⁵ star with lessening ray
 That lov'st to greet the early morn!
 Again thou usherest in ⁶ the day
 My Mary from my soul was torn!
 O Mary! dear departed shade!
 Where is thy place of blissful rest?
 See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

¹ *Sae* = *so*.

² *Could* = *cold*.

³ *Hae* = *have*.

⁴ Questi versi furono composti nel terzo anniversario della morte di Maria Campbell. Il poeta dopo avere atteso tutto il giorno ai lavori campestri tornò alla sera a casa e pieno di tristezza si trattenne gran parte della notte a contemplar silenzioso il cielo sereno e stellato. Rientrato in casa si mise subito a scrivere i versi a « Maria in Cielo ».

⁵ *To linger* = indugiare.

⁶ Annunzi.

That sacred hour can I forget? —
Can I forget the hallowed grove,
Where by the winding Ayr, we met
To live one day of parting love?
Eternity will not efface
Those records dear of transports past!
Thy image at our last embrace —
Ah! little thought we, 'twas our last!

Ayr, gurgling, kissed his pebbled shore,
O'er-hung with wild woods, thickening green;¹
The fragrant birch, and hawthorn hoar,
Twined amorous round the raptured scene,
The flowers sprang wanton² to be pressed;
The birds sang love on every spray;
Till, too, too soon, the glowing west
Proclaimed the speed of wingèd day.

Still o'er these scenes my memory wakes;
And fondly broods with miser care;
Time but the impression deeper makes, —
As streams their channels deeper wear.
My Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy blissful place of rest?
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

¹ Dalla folta verzura.

² Lascivi, vezzosi.

I LOVE MY JEAN

Of a' the airts ¹ the wind can blaw ²
I dearly like the west,
For there the bonnie lassie lives,
The lassie I lo'e best:
There wild woods grow, and rivers row,
And mony a hill between:
But day and night my fancy's flight
Is ever wi' my Jean.

I see her in the dewy flowers,
I see her sweet and fair:
I hear her in the tuneful birds,
I hear her charm the air:
There's not a bonnie flower that springs
By fountain, shaw, ³ or green,
There's not a bonnie bird that sings,
But minds me o' my Jean.

DESERTED

Ye banks and braes ⁴ o' bonnie Doon
How can ye blume ⁵ sae fair!
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu' o' care!

¹ *Of all the airs.*

² *To blow.*

³ *Boschetto.*

⁴ *Colline.*

⁵ *Bloom.*

Thou'll break my heart, thou bonnie bird
That sings upon the bough;
Thou minds me o' the happy days
When my fause ¹ Luvè was true.

Thou'll break my heart, thou bonnie bird
That sings beside thy mate;
For sae I sat, and sae I sang,
And wist na ² o' my fate.

Aft hae ³ I roved by bonnie Doon
To see the woodbine twine,
And ilka ⁴ bird sang o' its love,
And sae did I o' mine.

Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,
Frae aff its thorny tree;
And my fause luvè staw the rose,
But left the thorn wi' me.

FAREWELL TO SCOTLAND ⁵

The gloomy night is gathering fast,
Loud roars the wild inconstant blast,
Yon murky cloud is foul with rain,
I see it driving o'er the plain;
The hunter now has left the moor,
The scattered coveys ⁶ now meet secure,
While here I wander, prest with care,
Along the lonely banks of Ayr.

¹ *False*. | ² *Knew not*. | ³ *Often have I*. | ⁴ *Each*. | ⁵ Nell'ottobre del 1786 Burns pensò di emigrare nella Giamaica. | ⁶ *Covey* vuol dire *covata*: qui usato per stormi di uccelli.

The Autumn mourns her ripening corn
By early winter's ravage torn;
Across her placid, azure sky,
She sees the scowling tempest fly:
Chill runs my blood to hear it rave,
I think upon the stormy wave,
Where many a danger I must dare
Far from the bonnie¹ banks of Ayr.

'Tis not the surging billows roar,
'Tis not that fatal, deadly shore;
Tho' death in ev'ry shape appear,
The wretched have no more to fear:
But round my heart the ties are bound,
That heart transpierc'd with many a wound:
These bleed afresh, those ties I tear,
To leave the bonnie banks of Ayr.

Farewell, old Coilā's² hills and dales,
Her heathy moors and winding vales;
The scenes where wretched fancy roves,
Pursuing past, unhappy loves!
Farewell, my friends! Farewell my foes!
My peace with these, my love with those, —
The bursting tears my heart declare,
Farewell, the bonnie banks of Ayr.

¹ *Bonnie*: belle.

² Forma latina di *Kyle* o *Ayrshire*. Si suppone derivi da *Coilus*, re dei Pitti.

LETTER TO DR. MOORE

... Before leaving my country for ever I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power: I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears. I can truly say, that *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion, that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves. To know myself, had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation; where the lights and shades in my character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty. My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want of money, to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone,

I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde; for

‘hungry ruin had me in the wind’.

I had been for some days skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a goal; as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia, *The gloomy night was gathering fast*, when a letter from Dr. Blacklock to a friend of mine, overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. His opinion that I should meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition fired me so much that away I posted for that city, without a single letter of introduction. The baneful star, that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith, for once made a revolution to the Nadir; and a kind Providence placed me under the patronage of one of the noblest of men, the Earl of Glencairn.

I need relate no farther. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to catch the character and ‘the manners living as they rise’.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

1770-1850

William Wordsworth, il poeta che ebbe maggior influenza sulla poesia e sul pensiero del secolo XIX, nacque il 7 aprile 1770 a Cockermouth nel Cumberland, la pittoresca regione dei laghi inglesi. Passò la fanciullezza in continuo contatto con la natura, in faccia ai monti e ai laghi, libero di errare solitario tra i campi e di bagnarsi nelle fresche azzurre correnti del fiume nativo. Rimasto orfano a quattordici anni, fu mandato da uno zio alla scuola di Hawkshead e poi all'università di Cambridge, ove si laureò, senza lode e senza biasimo, in belle lettere. Dopo un viaggio in Svizzera, che rese ancor più vivo l'amor suo per le bellezze della natura, dimorò per qualche tempo a Londra; e la grande metropoli gl'inspirò il famoso sonetto *On Westminster Bridge*. Nel 1791 si recò in Francia, e fu preso d'ammirazione per la rivoluzione francese, ma poi, con un procedimento psicologico che ricorda quello del nostro Alfieri, i massacri del settembre gliene spensero gli entusiasmi, lasciandolo disilluso e addolorato. Tornato in Inghilterra, si stabilì a Grasmere, dove trascorse tranquillamente cinquant'anni della sua vita insieme con la sorella Dorothy e con la cugina Maria, divenuta sua moglie. Amò intensamente la solitudine della vita campestre, solo interrotta di tanto in tanto da visite di amici e rallegrata da lunghe passeggiate nei luoghi stupendi, che ci dipinge nelle sue liriche con la fedeltà e finezza di tocco del sommo paesaggista William Turner:

*The silence that is in the starry sky;
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.*

Nel 1793 Wordsworth pubblicò *Descriptive Sketches* tessuto di ricordi dei suoi viaggi in Francia e in Svizzera e *The Evening Walk*, e nel 1798 le *Lyrical Ballads*, scritte in collaborazione con Coleridge, che vi unì il famoso *Ancient Mariner*. Il Coleridge definisce esattamente la nota intima della poesia di Wordsworth, ciò che egli si propose di fare con la pubblicazione del famoso volumetto che segnò un'era nuova per la poesia inglese: « Mr. Wordsworth was to propose to himself as his object to give the charm of novelty to the things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us ».¹ Dopo le *Lyrical Ballads* si accinse a scrivere un'opera monumentale *The Recluse*, della quale però non diede in luce che due lunghi frammenti: *The Prelude*, la sua autobiografia poetica, e *The Excursion* (1814). Ma la sua gloria posa principalmente sui *Sonetti* che con quelli di Shakspeare e di Milton son i più belli che possenga la letteratura inglese, e su molte brevi liriche, ricche di versi di inimitabile bellezza, dove tutto è perfetto, come il distico famoso che il Ruskin loda con degna eloquenza:

*A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet.*²

Come già i neo-platonici fiorentini della rinascenza, Wordsworth concepì la natura come cosa vivente; per lui ogni fiore, ogni collina, ogni ruscello possiede un'anima sua propria e tra questa e la mente dell'uomo evvi una comunione, un'armonia che permette alla natura di svelare all'uomo i propri intimi pensieri in modo che tra loro si stabilisce un'unione perfetta: egli è il poeta della Natura e dell'Uomo, e nessuno dimostrò mai più vittoriosamente di lui quanto può esser potente nella sua semplicità la poesia il cui soggetto è

No other than the very heart of man.

¹ COLERIDGE, *Biographia Literaria*, London, Dent, 1906.

² Lines to his Wife « *She was a phantom of delight* ».

Wordsworth non possedette come Keats la 'gloria delle parole' o la bellezza sensuale della frase, non ebbe il meteorico splendore di Byron: queste non eran doti necessarie a un poeta che assunse come missione di dimostrare quanto interesse e quanta ricchezza sia nella umile vita di ogni giorno.

Trascorse tranquilla la vita tra la pace dei laghi e dei monti, e calma e dolce sbocciò la sua poesia, della quale par ch'egli stesso definisca l'intima essenza nei due versi della grande ode *On the Intimation of Immortality*. 'A me il più umile fiore che sboccia può ispirare pensieri troppo profondi da sciogliersi in lagrime'. Gli occhi suoi delicati amano le tinte tenui e pallide; egli è il poeta dell'ora pensosa che si passa nella luce dei soli che tramontano. Morì nel 1850, dopo esser succeduto a Southey quale poeta laureato, e riposa nel verde cimitero di Grasmere.

LUCY ¹.

She dwelt among the untrodden ways ²
Beside the springs of Dove;
A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.

A violet by a mossy stone
Half-hidden from the eye!
— Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

*
* *

I travell'd among unknown men
In lands beyond the sea;
Nor, England! did I know till then
What love I bore to thee.

'Tis past, that melancholy dream!
Nor will I quit thy shore
A second time; for still I seem
To love thee more and more.

¹ Nel 1799 quando Wordsworth fu in Germania vide ed amò una fanciulla la cui bellezza e la cui morte ispirarono queste liriche.

² Solitari sentieri.

Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire;
And she I cherish'd turned her wheel¹
Beside an English fire.

Thy mornings show'd, thy nights conceal'd
The bowers where Lucy play'd;
And thine too is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes survey'd.

*
* *

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seem'd a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.²

THREE YEARS SHE GREW

Three years she grew in sun and shower;
Then nature said 'A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown:
This Child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A lady of my own.

¹ Arcolaio.

² Si noti come la più sublime espressione del dolore può consistere nella semplice amplificazione di una frase: '*she is dead*'.

' Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.¹

' She shall be sportive as the fawn²
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And her's shall be the breathing balm,³
And her's the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate⁴ things.

' The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her;⁵ for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Ev'n in the motions of the storm
Grace that shall mould⁶ the maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

' The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round⁷
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

¹ Una vigile potenza che la incita o la frena.

² Allegra come un daino.

³ La brezza profumata.

⁴ Inanimate.

⁵ Le veleggianti nubi le daranno la loro dignità, grandezza.

⁶ Modellerà, plasmerà.

⁷ Ballano la loro capricciosa danza.

' And vital feelings of delight ¹
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell '.

Thus Nature spake — The work was done —
How soon my Lucy's race was run! ²
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm and quiet scene;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

THE DAFFODILS

I wander'd lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous ³ as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretch'd in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

¹ È il sentimento vitale della gioia.

² *Race* = corso della vita, (come trascorse veloce la vita della mia Lucia!).

³ Fitti.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did ¹ the sparkling waves in glee:
A Poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company!
I gazed — and gazed — but little thought
What wealth the show ² to me had brought;

For oft, ³ when on my couch ⁴ I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

THE SOLITARY REAPER ⁵

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain; ⁶
O listen! for the vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

¹ Vincevano, superavano.

² Quella vista.

³ Often.

⁴ Lettuccio.

⁵ Una delle più belle liriche di Wordsworth scritta nel 1803 dopo un viaggio nelle *Highlands* dove incontrò la piccola mietitrice.

⁶ Ritornello, canto.

No nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunts,
Among Arabian sands;
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers¹ flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay²
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again!

Whate'er the theme, the maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;³ —
I listen'd motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more.

¹ *Numbers* = versi, poesia.

² Canto.

³ Curva sopra la falce.

THE REVERIE OF POOR SUSAN ¹

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears
Hangs a thrush ² that sings loud, it has sung for three
[years.

Poor Susan has pass'd by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the bird.

'Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale
Down which she so often has tripp'd with her pail,³
And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's
The one only dwelling on earth that she loves.

She looks, and her heart is in heaven; but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade,
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all pass'd away from her eyes!

¹ *Susan* è una contadina che, abbandonati i suoi monti, si trova al servizio a Londra.

² Sta appeso nella sua gabbietta un tordo.

³ È scesa saltellando con la sua secchia.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

1772-1834

Samuel Taylor Coleridge nacque a Ottery St. Mary nel Devonshire il 21 ottobre 1772, figlio minore del reverendo Coleridge, vicario di quella parrocchia. Perdetto il padre a nove anni, e ottenne allora un posto gratuito al Christ's Hospital di Londra. Fin da ragazzo dimostrò viva passione per i classici, tanto che leggeva e recitava Omero e Pindaro. Nel 1791 passò all'Università di Cambridge, dove studiò poco e disordinatamente, e un bel giorno partì all'improvviso, pare per i molti debiti contratti, e s'arrolò in un reggimento di dragoni. Dopo qualche mese i suoi amici riuscirono a trovarlo e lo persuasero a tornare a Cambridge. In una gita che fece a Oxford conobbe il poeta Southey, che poi ritrovò nell'estate a Bristol. I due poeti divennero intimi amici e si fidanzarono con le sorelle Frickers, sebbene fossero privi di qualsiasi fortuna. Divisaronò allora di emigrare in America ove intendevano di fondare una colonia pantisocratica e vivere tranquilli e felici, lontani dalla civiltà e da tutti i suoi mali. Non riuscirono però a mettere insieme fondi sufficienti all'attuazione della folle idea, che fu presto abbandonata. Non abbandonarono però le Miss Frickers, che sposarono qualche mese dopo. Coleridge, dopo avere invano tentato la pubblicazione di un giornale settimanale, stampò nel 1796 il suo primo volume di versi e nello stesso anno l'*Ode to the Departing Year*. Stabilitosi a Nether Stowey nel Somersetshire, conobbe Wordsworth, che andò ad abitare lì vicino, e nacque tra di loro quell'amicizia che doveva dare frutti sì fecondi alla poesia inglese. Nelle lunghe passeggiate sulle colline di Quantock i due poeti vennero immaginando

f. 34
e componendo il volumetto delle *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) per il quale Coleridge scrisse *The Ancient Mariner*, uno dei capolavori della letteratura moderna, insuperabile per il potente realismo che pervade l'intero poema. Allo stesso periodo di feconda creazione appartiene *Christabel*, meraviglioso frammento di un lungo poema che il Coleridge aveva in mente di scrivere. Insieme con *Christabel* pubblicava un altro frammento, *Kubla Khan*, la meravigliosa 'visione di un sogno' come lo definisce il poeta. Nel settembre del 1798 Coleridge partì con Wordsworth per un viaggio in Germania, dove studiò la letteratura e la filosofia tedesca. Al ritorno in Inghilterra tradusse il *Wallenstein* di Schiller: uno dei pochi casi, se non l'unico, in cui la traduzione superò l'originale, tanto che lo stesso Schiller in una seconda edizione accettò le varianti e le aggiunte del Coleridge, ritraducendole in tedesco. Nel 1804 il poeta, che aveva preso la fatale abitudine dell'oppio, fece un viaggio per salute a Malta, e visitò anche la Sicilia, Napoli e Roma. Ritornato in Inghilterra, tentò ancora di fondare un giornale, *The Friend*, che ebbe vita breve. Nè più fortunate furono le sue letture su Shakspeare, che, sebbene siano giunte a noi soltanto in frammenti, rimarranno sempre dei più profondi e suggestivi saggi critici su Shakspeare che possieda la letteratura inglese. Avendo peggiorato in salute, dovette mettersi sotto le cure di un medico di Highgate, in casa del quale visse gli ultimi sedici anni della vita con qualche breve intervallo di attività letteraria, come attesta la sua *Biographia Literaria*, opera critica di gran valore, ove discute le teorie poetiche di Wordsworth. Coleridge morì il 25 luglio 1834 ad Highgate, vicino a Londra. f. 150

Sebbene il periodo creativo di Coleridge si limitasse a un anno o due, dal 1797 al 1798, in cui scrisse *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan*, *Love*, la breve produzione è più che sufficiente a porre il Coleridge fra i sommi poeti inglesi. Coleridge fu un visionario; egli visse in un mondo di sogni, ai quali talvolta diede colore e forma smagliante come pochi seppero fare, affascinando con l'onda melodica delle più pure e armoniose parole. Di lui scrisse Swinburne:

« Del suo volo e del suo canto allorchè si trova nel suo elemento è arduo parlare; vano tentar di parlarne adeguatamente. È naturale che non ci sia nulla di simile in altra opera umana; naturale che la sua poesia, nei momenti sublimi, sia di là da ogni lode e da ogni parola umana. Chi potesse definirla, potrebbe disfare un arcobaleno (*unweave a rainbow*); chi potesse lodarla giustamente, dovrebbe essere un altro poeta come lui ».¹ E lo Stopford Brooke nel *Golden Book of Coleridge*,² parlando del verso magico del poeta melodista, scrive: « Il suo verso, nei momenti più felici, è simile a una danza degli esseri elementari della natura: ora satiri selvaggi attorno al dio Pane; ora ninfe graziose, gaie e leggere come foglie estive al vento; ora impersonati fiumi e ruscelli in piena gioia esuberante; ora Ariele e i suoi spiriti saltellanti leggiadramente sulle sabbie senza orna. Egli cantò spesso come soffiano i venti e veleggiano le nubi; e, quando cantò così, fu egli una cosa sola con la vita della natura e non con quella dell'uomo ».

¹ C. A. SWINBURNE, *Essays and Studies*. Chatto and Windus, 1869, p. ix.

² STOPFORD BROOKE, *Golden Book of Coleridge*. Macmillan, 1895, p. 19

A CALM AT SEA

(From the '*Ancient Mariner*')¹

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow² followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.³

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck,⁴ nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

¹ L'*Ancient Mariner*, è un poema soprannaturale. Il vecchio marinaio racconta come il suo bastimento veleggiando verso il sud incontrasse un albatra, uccello di buon augurio e com'egli l'uccidesse. Da quel momento l'uccello comincia ad essere vendicato poichè giunti all'equatore cessa il vento e tutti i marinari muoion di fame meno il vecchio marinaio che soffre pene orribili. Appare alfine uno stuolo di angeli che al suono di musica celeste fanno muovere il bastimento. Il vecchio marinaio è così salvato e si pente.

² La scia.

³ L'Oceano Pacifico.

⁴ Rimanemmo fermi.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink,
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy ¹ sea.

About, about, in reel and rout ²
The death fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

From « CHRISTABEL »

(Part the Second)

Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;

¹ Limaccioso.

² *Reel* = danza; *rout* = folla: come folla danzante.

And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.
And thus it chanced, as I divine,
With Roland and Sir Leoline.
Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother:
They parted — ne'er to meet again!
But never either found another
To free the hollow heart from paining —
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;
A dreary sea now flows between.
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away, I ween,¹
The marks of that which once has been.

BIRTH OF THE 'LYRICAL BALLADS'

During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade; which moonlight or sunset, diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature. The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be com-

¹ Credo.

posed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditating and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves.

In this idea originated the plan of the « Lyrical Ballads »; which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and character supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

From SATYRANE'S LETTERS

Ratzeburg

No little fish thrown back into the water, no fly unimprisoned from a child's hand, could more buoyantly enjoy its element, than I this clean and peaceful house, with this lovely view of the town, groves, and lake of Ratzeburg, from the window at which I am writing. My spirits certainly, and my health I fancied, were beginning to sink under the noise, dirt, and unwholesome air of our Hamburg hotel. I left it on Sunday Sept. 23rd, with a letter of introduction from the poet Klopstock, to the *Amtmann* of Ratzeburg. The *Amtmann* received me with kindness, and introduced me to the worthy pastor, who agreed to board and lodge me for any length of time not less than a month. The vehicle, in which I took my place, was considerably larger than an English stage-coach, to which it bore much the same proportion and rude resemblance, than an elephant's ear does to the human. Its top was composed of naked boards of different colours, and seeming to have been parts of different wainscots. Instead of windows there were leathern curtains with a little eye of glass in each: they perfectly answered the purpose of keeping out the prospect and letting in the cold. I could observe little therefore, but the inns and farmhouses at which we stopped. They were all alike, except in size: one great room, like a barn, with a hay-loft over it, the straw and hay dangling in tufts through the boards which formed the ceiling of the room, and the floor of the loft. From this room, which is paved like a street, sometimes one, sometimes two smaller ones, are enclosed at one end. These are commonly floored. In the large room the cattle, pigs, poultry, men

women, and children live in amicable community; yet there was an appearance of cleanliness and rustic comfort. The woodwork of these buildings on the outside is left unplastered, as in old houses among us, and, being painted red and green, it cuts and tessellates the buildings very gaily. We were nearly the same time in travelling the thirty miles from Hamburg to Ratzeburg, as we had been in going from London to Yarmouth, one hundred and twenty-six miles. The lake of Ratzeburg runs from south to north, about nine miles in length, and varying in breadth from three miles to half a mile. About a mile from the southernmost point it is divided into two, of course very unequal, parts by an island, which, being connected by a bridge and a narrow slip of land with the one shore, and by another bridge of immense length with the other shore, forms a complete isthmus. On this island the town of Ratzeburg is built. The pastor's house or vicarage, and the church, stands near the summit of a hill, which slopes down to the slip of land and the little bridge, from which, through a superb military gate, you step into the island-town of Ratzeburg. From the turnings, windings, and indentations of the shore, the views vary almost every ten steps, and the whole has a sort of majestic beauty, a feminine grandeur. At the north of the lake, and peeping over it, I see the seven church towers of Lubec, at the distance of twelve or thirteen miles, yet as distinctly as if they were not three. The only defect in the view is, that Ratzeburg is built entirely of red bricks, and all the houses roofed with red tiles. To the eye, therefore, it present a clump of brick dust red. Yet this evening Oct. 10th, twenty minutes past five, I saw the town perfectly beautiful, and the whole softened down into

complete keeping, if I may borrow a term from the painters. The sky over Ratzeburg and all the east was a pure evening blue, while over the west it was covered with light sandy clouds. Hence a deep red light spread over the whole prospect, in undisturbed harmony with the red town, the brown-red woods, and the yellow-red reeds on the skirts of the lake. Two or three boats, with single persons paddling them, floated up and down in the rich light, which not only was itself in harmony with all, but brought all into harmony.

JANE AUSTIN /E

1775-1817

1e Jane Austⁿ, una delle più grandi scrittrici di romanzi che vanta la letteratura inglese, nacque nella piccola parrocchia di Steventon nell'Hampshire, di cui suo padre era rettore, ivi trascorrendo, appartata e tranquilla, i primi ventisei anni della sua vita. Alla morte del padre, la famiglia andò a stabilirsi a Southampton e poi a Chawton, presso Winchester. Poco si conosce della sua vita: non si sa quali studi avesse fatto, poichè rimase sempre in famiglia e morì prima che la fama la facesse divenire oggetto di curiosità, almeno per i pochi amici che la circondavano. Nel 1816 s'ammalò di consunzione, e l'anno dopo morì a Winchester a soli quarantadue anni. E sepolta nella cattedrale di quella città. I primi suoi romanzi, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, furono scritti a Steventon tra il 1796 e il 1798, sebbene fossero pubblicati soltanto nel 1811. Il secondo gruppo fu scritto a Chawton tra il 1811 e il 1816, e comprende *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Persuasion*. Argomento de' suoi libri è la vita della classe media nei piccoli paesi di campagna, ai primi dell'ottocento, la società tra la quale ella visse e che conosceva perfettamente. L'Austin costruisce dei caratteri che hanno tutta la suggestione della realtà per mezzo di una infinità di piccoli tocchi dati con grande maestria e squisita finezza. La tela de' suoi romanzi è assai breve; ella stessa dice che lavorava 'su di un pezzettino d'avorio largo due pollici con un pennello così fine da produrre poco effetto dopo molto lavoro'. Ma quanta verità e naturalezza ne' suoi

personaggi! quanta profondità di sottile osservazione! I critici più autorevoli son d'accordo nell'affermare che dopo Shakspeare nessuno scrittore riuscì come Jane Austin a svelare l'intimo dell'anima umana con poche frasi di dialogo. Il suo stile è impeccabile, limpido, terso, con un leggero profumo settecentesco che ricorda le migliori pagine di Johnson e di Addison.

MR. BENNET AND HIS WIFE

(From *Pride and Prejudice*. Chap. 1)

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

« My dear Mr. Bennet », said his lady to him one day, « have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last? » Mr. Bennet replied that he had not. « But it is, » returned she; « for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it ».

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

« Do you want to know who has taken it? » cried his wife impatiently ».

« You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it ». This was invitation enough.

« Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England, that he came down on Monday on a chaise and four to see the place, and was so delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week ».

« What is his name? ».

« Bingley ».

« Is he married or single? ».

« Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a-year. What a fine thing for our girls! ».

« How so? how can it affect them? ».

« My dear Mr. Bennet », replied his wife, « how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them ».

« Is that his design in settling here? ».

« Design! nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes ».

« I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will still be better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party ».

« My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty ».

« In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of ».

« But my dear, you must go indeed and see Mr. Bingley, when he comes into the neighbourhood ».

« It is more than I engage for, I assure you ».

« But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not ».

« You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say, Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you; to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls, though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy ».

« I desire you will do no such a thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good-humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving *her* the preference ».

« They have none of them much to recommend them », replied he; « they are all silly and ignorant, like other girls; but Lizzie has something more of quickness than her sisters ».

« Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way! you take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves ».

« You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least ».

« Ah! you do not know what I suffer ».

« But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood ».

« It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them ».

« Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all ».

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts,¹ sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient

¹ *Parts* = capacità. ingegno.

to make his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

WALTER SCOTT

1771-1832

Walter Scott, il primo dei grandi romanzieri moderni e uno de' più amabili scrittori inglesi, nacque a Edimburgo il 15 agosto 1771. Suo padre, dotto conoscitore del diritto feudale, era *Writer to the Signet*, uno, cioè, degli avvocati che in antico preparavano nell'ufficio del segretario di Stato i documenti che poi erano sottoposti al sigillo reale (*Royal Signet*). Gli Scott discendevano da un ramo cadetto del grande *Scott clan*, il cui capo feudale era il duca di Buccleuch. Suo nonno fu un ardente Giacobita, che perdette ogni suo avere in difesa della causa degli Stuardi: Walter Scott ereditava dunque alcun che dello spirito avventuroso e feudale della sua razza. Una malattia avuta da bambino lo lasciò con una gamba leggermente contratta, che lo faceva camminare un po' zoppo, tanto che fu costretto a restare in riposo per assai tempo e divenne un appassionato lettore. Per rimettersi in salute fu mandato in campagna da suo nonno, che dimorava a Landy Knowe vicino a un antico castello diroccato, ritrovo favorito del piccolo Walter. A nove anni fu mandato a studiare a Edimburgo, e divenne caro ai compagni per la facilità e l'arte con cui narrava loro racconti e storie scozzesi. Passò poi all'Università, si laureò in legge, ed entrò nello studio di suo padre. Ma più che di questioni legali si occupava a leggere antichi documenti, storie e vecchie cronache, e a fare escursioni sulle aspre montagne della Scozia in cerca di antiche ballate e leggende continuando, più o meno cosciente, le ricerche di chi lo aveva preceduto negli studi della poesia

popolare. Si appassionò così delle bellezze del paesaggio scozzese, e più specialmente dei luoghi che avessero qualche storico ricordo: bastava vedesse un vecchio castello, un campo di battaglia, perchè subito li popolasse degli antichi feudatari e combattenti, e ne evocasse agli astanti affascinati gli eventi fortunosi e le pittoresche costumanze. Le vecchie pergamene, le armi, le ferraglie arrugginite e corrose lo attiravano irresistibilmente e gli suscitavano nella mente fantasmi e poesia. Il suo primo lavoro letterario fu una versione della famosa ballata di Bürger, *Lenore*, ch'egli tradusse per conquistare il cuore della figlia di un baronetto, per la quale, sebbene non potesse sposarla, nutrì sempre viva passione romantica. In seguito sposò la figlia di un emigrato francese, Mademoiselle Charpentier, che gli fu compagna fedele negli splendori e nelle miserie della sua vita.

Dopo qualche altra scorreria nel campo allora nuovo della letteratura tedesca, dopo aver imitato alcune ballate e tradotto il *Goetz von Berlichingen* di Goethe, si diede a raccogliere ballate scozzesi, che pubblicò nel 1802 col nome di *Scottish Minstrelsy*. Fin qui nulla faceva prevedere che lo Scott, già trentaquattrenne, sarebbe divenuto poeta originale, quando nel 1805 pubblicò il *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, che destò grande entusiasmo non solo in Inghilterra, ma in tutta Europa. Tre anni dopo, nel 1808, pubblicò la sua migliore poesia, *Marmion*, seguito dalla *Lady of the Lake* (1810) e dal *Lord of the Isles* (1815). Lo Scott fu in questi anni il più popolare dei poeti inglesi, e contribuì forse più di ogni altro a diffondere le idee della nuova scuola romantica. Oggidi il profumo della sua poesia è in gran parte svanito: nel concitato racconto di avventure, nelle lunghe descrizioni di montagne e di boschi, di laghi e di castelli non si sentono quelle voci intime, che, come echi, accompagnano sempre la grande poesia. Pure alcuni passi conservano una perenne freschezza, e i suoi canti pieni di spontaneità e di fragranza sono ancor oggi ammirati: alcuni di questi hanno intonazione guerresca, come *Waken Lords and Ladies Gay*; altri hanno tutto il fascino delle zampogne scozzesi, come *Pibroch of Donal Dhu*;

altri il lamento triste e soave de' montanari irlandesi, come *Coronach*. Ma la fama del poeta doveva impallidire innanzi ai trionfi del romanziere. Non si sa precisamente per quali ragioni lo Scott lasciasse la poesia per divenir romanziere. Alcuni anni prima aveva cominciato una storia che poi aveva lasciata a mezzo; la finì e la pubblicò nel 1814 col titolo di *Waverly*. Argomento del libro era il fatto più eroicamente romantico della storia dell'isola; la sfortunata spedizione dell'ultimo Stuart, Carlo Edoardo, per ricuperare il trono dei suoi antenati. Seguirono *The Antiquary* e *Guy Mannering*. Il successo di questi romanzi fu enorme: i luoghi descritti dal 'Mago del Nord', divennero la mèta d'un vero pellegrinaggio, e il velo che aveva nascosto la Scozia non solo all'Europa ma agli stessi Inglesi, fu tolto per sempre. Per diciassette anni lo Scott continuò la sua opera gigantesca, che doveva terminare solo con la sua morte, pubblicando l'un dopo l'altro *Ivanhoe*, *The Betrothed*, *The Talisman*, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, che riguardano il periodo del feudalismo normanno; le due grandi trilogie: *The Monastery*, *The Abbot* e *Kenilworth*, che riguardano i tempi degli ultimi Tudor, e *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *Woodstock*, e *Peveril of the Peak*, che hanno per sfondo storico il regno dei primi tre Stuardi.

Col guadagno delle sue opere, che salì a duecentomila sterline, lo Scott poté effettuare il sogno da lungo tempo accarezzato, di erigersi un castello feudale a Abbotsford sulle pittoresche sponde della Tweed presso le rovine dell'abbazia di Melrose, e da vero barone feudale spalancò le porte del suo castello agli amici che intratteneva con signorile prodigalità. Ma sfortunatamente il grande romanziere era divenuto socio de' suoi editori Ballantyne e Constable, i quali a sua insaputa fecero delle arrischiate speculazioni che portarono al fallimento della ditta; così si trovò anch'egli responsabile per la ingente somma di centoquarantamila sterline. Sopportò con grande animo l'avversa fortuna, e acconsentì a mettere il suo ingegno a servizio dei creditori. « Vedo dinanzi a me, diceva, un lungo, tedioso, oscuro sentiero, che però conduce alla vera fama e alla immacolata reputazione. Se soccomberò sotto il

peso, com'è probabile, morrò con onore; se compirò il mio dovere, avrò l'approvazione della mia coscienza ». Fu opera ammirevole e gloriosa, ma ebbe tragica fine; chè in sette anni di lavoro indefesso il suo cervello si esaurì e la sua fibra si spezzò nello sforzo immane. Intraprese un viaggio nel Mediterraneo, su di una nave da guerra messa a sua disposizione dal Governo; visitò Malta e Napoli; e parve la sua salute volesse rifiorire: ma invece al ritorno fu colpito da paralisi e visse appena abbastanza da giungere in patria nel suo castello di Abbotsford, dove serenamente si spense il 21 settembre 1832.

*f. 164 per
Walter Scott
sulla storia
della lingua*

Walter Scott, il vero creatore del romanzo storico, che passò dall'inglese a tutte le letterature di Europa, ed ebbe capolavori e maestri diversamente grandi anche in Italia e in Francia, condusse alla sua più alta perfezione questo genere di racconto, ed ebbe il dono di dar vita alle persone, all'intreccio, al dialogo, non con piccoli tocchi come l'Austin, ma gettando sull'ampia tela grandi linee, larghi tratti di colore e un caldo movimento, dando alle sue narrazioni il fascino del colore locale, frutto di lunghi studi e di un animo imbevuto del più pretto spirito medievale.

Sebbene alcuni dei suoi caratteri, particolarmente le sue eroine, siano tratteggiati con poca profondità psicologica; sebbene la sua lingua sia talora sciatta, e non manchino a' suoi racconti pagine tediose e inesattezze storiche; i romanzi di Walter Scott sono parte assai cara della eredità letteraria della razza inglese: essi hanno rallegrato le ore brune di tre generazioni con l'onestà e la purezza che spira da ogni lor pagina, con l'amore franco e sincero con cui lo scrittore ama l'uomo e la natura e il suo paese nativo; ed egli ne è ricompensato con una fama sempre luminosa e certo imperitura.

From 'KENILWORTH' ¹ (1821)

(Chap. xvi)

It was the twilight of a summer night and all were in anxious expectation of the queen's immediate approach. The multitude had remained assembled for many hours, and their numbers were still on the increase. A profuse distribution of refreshments had kept the populace in perfect love and loyalty towards the queen and her favourite, which might have somewhat abated had fasting been added to watching. They passed away the time, therefore, with the usual popular amusements; when, all of a sudden, a single rocket was seen to shoot into the atmosphere, and far over flood and field the great bell of the castle tolled. Immediately there was a dead silence, succeeded by a deep hum of expectation, the united voice of many thousands, none of whom spoke above their breath.

'They come now for certain', said Raleigh. 'Tressilian, that sound is grand. We hear it from this distance as mariners after a long voyage hear upon their night watch the tide rush upon some distant and unknown shore'.

¹ Kenilworth è uno dei più popolari romanzi di Walter Scott. Ogni anno migliaia di persone da ogni parte del mondo vanno a visitare le pittoresche rovine del castello di Kenilworth situato nei dintorni di Warwick. Nel luglio del 1575 la regina Elisabetta fu ospitata nel castello dal conte di Leicester, suo favorito. Il Leicester aveva poco prima sposato secretamente Amy Robsart, l'eroina del romanzo, e questo matrimonio è ora di ostacolo alle mire ambiziose del conte che aspira alla mano della bionda regina.

His further meditations were interrupted by a shout of applause from the multitude, so tremendous that the country echoed for miles round. The guards, thickly stationed along the road, caught up the acclamation, which ran like wildfire to the castle, and announced to all within that Queen Elizabeth had entered the Royal Chasé of Kenilworth. The whole music of the castle sounded at once, and a round of artillery, with a salvo of small arms, was discharged from the battlements. Onward came the cavalcade, illuminated by two hundred thick waxen torches, which cast a light like that of broad day all about the procession, but especially on the principal group, of which the queen herself, arrayed in the most splendid manner, and blazing with jewels, formed the central figure. She was mounted on a milk-white horse, which she reined with peculiar grace and dignity; and in the whole of her stately and noble carriage you saw the daughter of a hundred kings.

Leicester, who glittered like a golden image with jewels and cloth of gold, rode on her Majesty's right hand. The black steed which he mounted had not a single white hair on his body, and was one of the most renowned chargers in Europe, having been purchased by the earl at large expense for this royal occasion. Yet, though neither eye nor feature betrayed aught but feelings which suited the occasion, some of the earl's personal attendants remarked that he was unusually pale and they expressed to each other their fear that he was taking more fatigue than consisted with his health.

Varney followed close behind his master, and kept his eye constantly upon him. For although Varney was one of the few moral monsters, who contrive to lull to sleep the remorse of their own bosoms, and are drugged

into moral insensibility by atheism, yet he knew that in the breast of his patron there was already awakened the fire that is never quenched, and that his lord felt amid all the pomp and magnificence the gnawing of the worm that dieth not.

Under the splendid fireworks, the queen entered the base-court of Kenilworth through Mortimer's Tower, and, moving on through pageants of heathen gods and heroes of antiquity, who offered gifts and compliments on bended knee, at length found her way to the Great Hall of the castle, gorgeously hung for her reception with the richest silken tapestry, misty with perfumes, and sounding to strains of soft and delicious music. The hall was illuminated by twenty-four torches of wax. At the upper end of the splendid apartment was a state canopy, overshadowing a royal throne, and beside was a door, which opened to a long suite of apartments, decorated with the utmost magnificence for the queen and her ladies.

The queen, shortly after her arrival, inquired for Amy Robsart; but, on being informed, on the certificate of Dr. Alasco, that she was detained in Oxfordshire by a slight illness, her Majesty was compelled to be content.

It is unnecessary to say anything further of the festivities of the evening, which were so brilliant in themselves, and received with such obvious and willing satisfaction by the queen, that Leicester retired at length to his own apartment, with all the giddy raptures of successful ambition. Varney, who had changed his splendid attire, and now waited upon his patron in a very modest and plain undress, was there ready in attendance.

Varney officiously assisted his lord to bed, and placed a massive silver night-lamp, with a short sword, on a marble table which stood close by the head of the couch. Leicester drew the curtain so as completely to shade

his face. Varney took a seat near the bed, and quietly waited till Leicester himself led the way to the topic by which his mind was engrossed.

« And so, Varney », said the earl, after waiting in vain till his dependent should commence the conversation, « men talk of the queen's favour towards me? She is indeed my good and gracious mistress, but it is written, 'Put not thy trust in princes ».

« A good sentence and a true », said Varney « unless you can unite their interest with yours so absolutely, that they must needs sit on your wrist like hooded hawks ».

« I know what thou meanest », said Leicester impatiently; « thou wouldst intimate, I might marry the queen if I would? »

« It is your speech, my lord, not mine », answered Varney; « but whosoever be the speech, it is the thought of ninety-nine out of a hundred men throughout broad England ».

« Ay, but », said Leicester, turning himself in his bed, « the hundredth man knows better. Thou, for example, knowest the obstacle that cannot be over-leaped ».

« It must be, my lord, if the stars speak true », said Varney composedly.

« Thou art right », said Leicester, again tossing himself on his couch. « The whole earth wishes for it. I have had advices from the Reformed Churches of Germany — from the Low Countries — from Switzerland, urging this as a point on which Europe's safety depends. France will not oppose it — the ruling party in Scotland look to it as their best security — Spain fears it, but cannot prevent it — and yet thou knowest it is impossible ».

« I know not that, my lord », said Varney; « the countess is indisposed ».

« Villain! » said Leicester, starting up on his couch, and seizing the sword which lay on the table beside him, « go thy thoughts that way? — thou wouldst not do murder! »

« For whom or what do you hold me, my lord » said Varney, assuming the superiority of an innocent man subjected to unjust suspicion. « I said nothing to deserve such a horrid imputation as your violence infers. I said but that the countess was ill. And countess though she be — lovely and beloved as she is — surely your lordship must hold her to be mortal? She may die, and your lordship's hand become once more your own!

‘Away! away!’ said Leicester; ‘let me have no more of this!’

SHERWOOD FOREST¹ IN THE TIME OF RICHARD I

(From ‘*Ivanhoe*’ chap. 1)

The sun was setting upon one of the rich grassy glades² of the forest. Hundreds of broad-headed, short-stemmed, wide-branched oaks, which had witnessed, perhaps, the stately march of the Roman soldiery, flung their gnarled arms over a thick carpet of the most delicious greensward: in some places they were intermingled with beeches, hollies and copsewood³ of various descriptions, so closely as totally to intercept the level beams of the sinking sun; in others they receded from each other, forming those long, sweeping⁴ vistas, in the

¹ Nella contea di Nottingham.

² Radura.

³ Boschetti; alberi di piccolo taglio.

⁴ Ampio, che abbraccia molte cose.

intricacy of which the eye delights to lose itself; while imagination considers them as the paths to yet wilder scenes of silvan solitude. Here the red rays of the sun shot a broken and discoloured light, that partially hung upon the shattered boughs and mossy trunks of the trees; and there they illuminated, in brilliant patches, the portions of turf to which they made their way. A considerable open space in the midst of this glade seemed formerly to have been dedicated to the rites of Druidical superstition; for on the summit of a hillock, so regular as to seem artificial, there still remained part of a circle of rough, unhewn stones, of large dimensions. Seven stood upright; the rest had been dislodged from their places, probably by the zeal of some convert to Christianity, and lay, some prostrate near their former site, and others on the side of the hill. One large stone only had found its way to the bottom and, in stopping the course of a small brook which glided smoothly round the foot of the eminence, gave, by its opposition, a feeble voice of murmur to the placid and elsewhere silent streamlet.

The human figures which completed this landscape were in number two, partaking, in their dress and appearance, of that wild and rustic character which belonged to the woodlands of the West Riding of Yorkshire at that early period. The eldest of these men had a stern, savage, and wild aspect. His garment was of the simplest form imaginable, being a close jacket with sleeves, composed of the tanned skin of some animal, on which the hair had been originally left, but which had been worn off in so many places that it would have been difficult to distinguish, from the patches that remained, to what creature the fur had belonged. This primeval vestment reached from the throat to the

knees and served at once all the usual purposes of body-clothing. There was no wider opening at the collar than was necessary to admit the passage of the head, from which it may be inferred that it was put on by slipping it over the head and shoulders, in the manner of a modern shirt, or ancient hauberk. Sandals, bound with thongs made of boar's hide, protected the feet, and a roll of thin leather was twined artificially around the legs, and, ascending above the calf, left the knees bare, like those of a Scottish Highlander. To make the jacket sit yet more close to the body, it was gathered at the middle by a broad leathern belt, secured by a brass buckle, to one side of which was attached a sort of scrip, and to the other a ram's horn, accoutred with a mouth-piece, for the purpose of blowing. In the same belt was stuck one of those long, broad, sharp-pointed, and two-edged knives, with a buck's horn-handle, which were fabricated in the neighbourhood, and bore, even at this early period, the name of a Sheffield whittle. The man had no covering upon his head, which was only defended by his own thick hair, matted and twisted together, and scorched by the influence of the sun into a rusty, dark-red colour, forming a contrast with the overgrown beard upon his cheeks, which was rather of a yellow or amber hue. One part of his dress only remains; but it is too remarkable to be suppressed. It was a brass ring, resembling a dog's collar but without any opening, and soldered fast round his neck, so loose as to form no impediment to his breathing, yet so tight as to be incapable of being removed excepting by the use of the file. On this singular gorget was engraved, in Saxon characters, an inscription of the following purport: « Gurth, the son of Beowulph; is the born thrall of Cedrid of Rotherwood ».

Beside the swine-herd — for such was Gurth's occupation — was seated, upon one of the fallen Druidical monuments, a person about ten years younger in appearance, and whose dress, though resembling his companion's in form, was of better materials and a more fantastic appearance. His jacket had been stained of a bright purple hue, upon which there had been some attempt to paint grotesque ornaments in different colours. To the jacket he added a short cloak, which scarcely reached half-way down his thigh. It was of crimson cloth, though a good deal soiled, lined with bright yellow; and as he could transfer it from one shoulder to the other, or, at his pleasure, draw it all around him, its width, contrasted with its want of longitude, formed a fantastic piece of drapery. He had thin silver bracelets upon his arms, and on his neck a collar of the same metal, bearing the inscription; « Wamba, the son of Witless is the thrall of Cedric of Rotherwood ». This personage had the same sort of sandals with his companion; but instead of the roll of leather thong, his legs were cased in a sort of gaiters, of which one was red and the other yellow. He was provided also with a cap, having around it more than one bell, about the size of those attached to hawks, which tingled as he turned his head to one side or other and as he seldom remained a minute, in the same posture, the sound might be considered as incessant. Around the edge of this cap was a stiff bandeau of leather, cut at the top into open work resembling a coronet; while a prolonged bag arose from within it, and fell down on one shoulder, like an old fashioned night-cap, or a jelly-bag,¹ or the head-gear of a modern hussar. It was to this part of

¹ Un sacchetto attraverso cui si distilla la gelatina.

the cap that the bells were attached, which circumstance, as well as the shape of his head-dress, and his own half-crazed, half-cunning expression of countenance, sufficiently pointed him out as belonging to the race of domestic clowns or jesters maintained in the houses of the wealthy, to help away the tedium of those lingering hours which they were obliged to spend within doors. He bore, like his companion, a scrip attached to his belt; but had neither horn nor knife, being probably considered as belonging to a class whom it is esteemed dangerous to intrust with edge-tools. In place of these, he was equipped with a sword of lath, resembling that with which Harlequin operates his wonders upon the modern stage.

The outward appearance of these two men formed scarce a stronger contrast than their look and demeanor. That of the serf or bondsman was sad and sullen; his aspect was bent on the ground with an appearance of deep dejection, which might be almost construed into apathy, had not the fire which occasionally sparkled in his red eye manifested that there slumbered, under the appearance of sullen despondency, a sense of oppression, and a disposition to resistance. The looks of Wamba, on the other hand, indicated, as usual with his class, a sort of vacant curiosity, and fidgety impatience of any posture of repose, together with the utmost self-satisfaction respecting his own situation, and the appearance which he made. The dialogue which they maintained between them was carried on in Anglo-Saxon, which was universally spoken by the inferiour classes, excepting the norman soldiers and the immediate personal dependents of the great feudal nobles.

LORD BYRON

1788-1824

Giorgio Byron nacque a Londra il 22 gennaio 1788 da famiglia così antica, che si vantava discendere dai conquistatori normanni. Il prozio di lui, dal quale poi ereditò il titolo e gli averi, uccise in una zuffa di taverna il suo parente Mr. Chaworth, e per le sue malvagità si guadagnò il nome di *Wicked Lord*. Il padre del poeta, il capitano John Byron, uomo senza principii e scapestrato quanto mai, aveva sposato una signorina di buona famiglia scozzese, Miss Gordon di carattere impetuoso e violento quanto il marito; e il Byron fu loro unico figlio. Gli sposi presto si divisero, e il fanciullo andò a vivere con la madre ad Aberdeen, ove passò anni tutt'altro che lieti. Nato così da una razza tempestosa fino alla pazzia e allevato dalla madre tra accessi di furia e di tenerezza, il suo carattere divenne di una sensibilità e irascibilità quasi morbosa. A dieci anni ereditò dallo zio il titolo di *lord* e la proprietà di Newstead in Nottinghamshire. Tre anni dopo fu mandato alla scuola di Harrow, e nel 1805 al Trinity College dell'Università di Cambridge, dove studiò poco e non si laureò: in compenso aveva letto moltissimo, e si era acquistata una solida coltura letteraria. Un episodio della sua giovinezza lasciò tracce tanto profonde sul suo spirito, che non se ne può tacere. L'unica erede della famiglia Chaworth, della quale il prozio di Byron aveva ucciso il capo, era Mary Chaworth, bellissima ragazza di due anni maggiore del poeta. Vivendo ad Annesley, vicino a Newstead, nacque tra loro una certa intimità, che in Byron si mutò presto in forte passione. Ma la ragazza lo respinse con disprezzo, e poco dopo si fidanzò a un altro. Questo primo

disinganno d'amore ferì profondamente il poeta, che vi allude di frequente; è anzi il soggetto di una delle sue liriche più belle *The Dream*, scritta dodici anni dopo, in cui ha la visione di colei 'che era il suo destino', della 'stella della sua fanciullezza':

*Wed with one
Who did not love her better.*

Fin da fanciullo Byron si era provato a scriver versi, e nel 1808 pubblicò un volumetto di poesie giovanili, *Hours of Idleness*, che un anno dopo fu aspramente criticato dalla *Edinburgh Review*. La critica era giusta, ma forse eccessiva, sebbene il 'Perfect Timon not nineteen' invitasse all'attacco. Il poeta rispose con la famosa satira *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, nella quale punse con acuto strale anche lo Scott, il Coleridge, il Wordsworth. La satira ebbe gran successo, ma Byron più tardi si pentì di aver giudicato così male poeti dei quali aveva dovuto riconoscere tutta la grandezza. Nel 1809 intraprese un viaggio sul continente: traversò la Spagna, visitò la Grecia, la Turchia; e il soggiorno nei paesi luminosi del Mediterraneo compì di svolgere liberamente il suo genio. Durante questi viaggi venne componendo due canti di un poema, il *Childe Harold*, che pubblicò l'anno dopo il suo ritorno in Inghilterra, nel 1812. Il successo fu immediato e straordinario; sette edizioni si esaurirono in cinque settimane. Nei due anni seguenti il poeta scrisse e pubblicò l'abbagliante serie di quei poemi, il cui color locale era preso dai paesi del Mediterraneo, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Corinth* e *Parisina*. Tutto il fuoco del mezzogiorno si sprigiona da questi versi con forza vulcanica, mentre in ogni canto si delinea la figura di Byron, l'uomo dalla fronte pallida, dal sorriso fatale, misteriosamente affascinante. In queste prime produzioni non abbiamo che una parte di Byron: sopra tutto lo slancio, il calore della passione, e anche molta retorica. I versi son pieni, sonori, si susseguono con bel ritmo; ma manca al poeta la finezza e la squisita melodia de' suoi grandi contemporanei. Il giovane Lord, la

cui bellezza era pari all'ingegno, fu festeggiato e accarezzato dalla società inglese come nessun altro era stato mai; se non che in un cattivo momento sposò Miss Anna Isabella Milbanke, fanciulla di carattere riservato e freddo, incapace di offendere ma anche di perdonare. Dopo un anno, Lady Byron lasciò la casa del marito, nè più vi fece ritorno. Non si sa neanche oggi con sicurezza per quali ragioni ella abbandonasse il marito, poichè conservò sempre il più sdegnoso silenzio, e le memorie lasciate da Byron all'amico e futuro biografo Moore, quale suo esecutore letterario, furono da questo distrutte. L'opinione pubblica si schierò recisamente contro il poeta, che in verità troppo si compiaceva di mettere in mostra i suoi trascorsi. Davanti all'impetuoso torrente di indignazione che gli si rovesciò addosso, nell'aprile del 1816, egli lasciò sdegnato l'Inghilterra, che non rivede mai più. Viaggiò nel Belgio, visitò i campi di Waterloo, e di là lungo il Reno arrivò in Svizzera, sul lago di Ginevra, ove s'incontrò con l'altro grande esule, lo Shelley e nacque così la famosa amicizia che tanto doveva influire sulla vita e sull'opera loro. Le migliori poesie di Byron furono scritte in questo ultimo periodo della sua vita, in cui l'avversa fortuna fu potente stimolo a dargli la sincerità della creazione. Mentre era a Ginevra, scrisse il *Prisoner of Chillon*, il terzo canto del *Childe Harold*, che contiene la famosa descrizione di Waterloo, le brevi poesie *The Dream*, *Darkness*, descrizione questa della fine della vita sulla terra, *Manfred*, poema drammatico ispirato dalla selvaggia grandezza delle Alpi, *Beppo*, satira sociale in ottava rima, e *Mazeppa*, con la famosa descrizione della corsa sfrenata della vittima legata al cavallo tartaro:

*Away, away, my steed and I,
Upon the pinions of the wind,
All human dwellings left behind;*

*We sped like meteors through the sky,
When with its crackling sound the night
Is chequered with the northern light:
Town — village — none were on our track,*

*But a wild plain of far extent
 And bounded by a forest black...
 But fast we fled, away, away —
 And I could neither sigh nor pray;
 And my cold sweat-drops fell like rain
 Upon the courser's bristling mane;
 But, snorting still with rage and fear,
 He flew upon his wild career.*

Lasciata la Svizzera, Byron venne a Venezia, dove condusse vita dissipata, finchè una dama italiana, la contessa Guiccioli, non lo trasse dalla depravazione in cui era caduto, rimanendogli poi sempre devota, e ricambiata poi sempre di pari devozione da parte del poeta. Si stabilirono a Ravenna, e fu questo un periodo di grande attività letteraria per Byron. Lavorò al *Don Juan*, grande satira sociale; e, consigliatovi dalla Guiccioli, cui non piaceva la leggerezza e il cinismo del *Don Juan*, scrisse i poemi drammatici *Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari*, *Cain*, e *The Vision of Judgement*, satira in ottava rima dell'opera omonima del Southey. Più tardi, quando era a Pisa, il poeta volle continuare il *Don Juan* fino al 16° canto, che vanta le più fulgide pagine della poesia Byroniana.

Byron fu sempre amico della libertà di tutti i popoli: la causa della indipendenza italiana gli fu cara, e la sollevazione della Grecia contro i Turchi lo accese di tale entusiasmo che eroicamente volle recarsi a combattere tra le file degli insorti. Partì da Genova nell'estate del 1823, ma di lì a poco sbarcato a Missolungi, fu preso dalle febbri, e, dopo una settimana di malattia, il generoso poeta spirò appena trentasettenne.

I critici non sono oggidi molto d'accordo nel valutare quanta vera poesia si trovi sotto le smaglianti forme della produzione e dell'arte byroniana. Ma non sentite voi — scrisse il Carducci, con profondo sentimento di ciò che è sostanza ed essenza della poesia, — ma non sentite voi la grande falsità de' poemi di Giorgio Byron, non v'annoiate in quella cavernosa vuotezza popolata solo dai lirici contorcimenti e dagli

ululati di quel Lacoonte dell'anima sua?¹ In vero in questi ultimi anni la fama di Byron si è andata offuscando specialmente in Inghilterra, ove si è più in grado di scorgere i difetti della sua poesia. È infatti assai grave difetto di Byron che raramente il suo verso sia finito e perfetto: indarno vi cercheremmo la meravigliosa armonia, la finezza di lingua di Keats, Shelley, Tennyson. Vi si trova invece un bel-l'impeto: lo si direbbe uno spumeggiante torrente di armonia che talvolta è un gran romore di trombe e di tamburi. La sua poesia ha poche recondite bellezze; l'effetto è immediato, come quello dell'oratoria. Il Saintbury² osserva giustamente che alla grande popolarità di cui godette Byron conferirono due elementi: l'uso del paesaggio e del vocabolario esotico allora poco noto; la figura del personaggio principale, l'eroe byroniano, che disprezza tutte le leggi morali, ed ha un passato misterioso che gli dà una melanconia profonda. Il tipo non era nuovo; ma è fatto noto nella storia letteraria che un tipo già più o meno familiare, presentato con aggiunte notevoli, riesce facilmente più popolare di tipi del tutto nuovi. Ma, tolti questi elementi effimeri, resta pur sempre una parte della sua poesia degna della fama stupefacente del poeta: l'influenza della natura, delle vaste solitudini, del cielo stellato, del deserto, della terra primitiva non ancora contaminata da impronta umana, delle alte montagne, il cui spettacolo calmava il suo spirito agitato, si sente nella sua opera in passi di grande bellezza e di vero splendore poetico. Egli fu grande nella satira della vita sociale, come nell'impareggiabile *Don Juan*, e nella invettiva, della quale la *Vision of Judgement* è forse il più bell'esempio. In Byron dobbiamo inoltre ammirare un esempio meraviglioso di forza e di vitalità, la voce più possente de' suoi tempi, la forza dominante del movimento romantico europeo, l'inspiratore — per circa un mezzo secolo — della letteratura italiana e spagnuola.

¹ CARDUCCI, *Prose*; ediz. cit. *Ca ira*, pag. 972. Però nel sonetto a Carlo Chiarini, *Carlo, su 'l risonante adriaco lido*, esprime un altro giudizio.

² G. SAINTBURY, *Nineteenth Century Literature*, London, Macmillan, 1909, pag. 79.

When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted,
To sever for years
Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this!

The dew of the morning
Sunk chill on my brow;
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now.
Thy vows are all broken,
And light is thy fame:
I hear thy name spoken
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o'er me --
Why wert thou so dear?
They know not I knew thee
Who knew thee too well:
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met:
In silence I grieve
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years,
How should I greet thee? --
With silence and tears.

TWILIGHT

(From *Parisina*)

It is the hour when from the boughs
The nightingale's high note is heard;
It is the hour when lover's vows
Seem sweet in every whispered word;
And gentle winds, and waters near,
Make music to the lonely ear.
Each flower the dews have lightly wet,
And in the sky the stars are met,
And on the wave is deeper blue,
And on the leaf a browner hue,
And in the heaven that clear obscure
So softly dark, and darkly pure,
Which follows the decline of day,
As twilight melts beneath the moon away.

APOSTROPHE TO THE OCEAN

Childe Harold. Canto iv

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar;
I love not man the less, but nature more,
From ¹ these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the universe and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

¹ *sottinteso*: quando vengo.

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll,
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
 Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
 Stops with the shore; upon the watery plain
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
 A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
 When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
 He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan
 Without a grave, unknelled,¹ uncoffined, and unknown.

His steps are not upon thy paths — thy fields
 Are not a spoil for him — thou dost arise
 And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields,
 For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
 Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
 And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray,
 And howling to his gods, where haply lies
 His petty hope in some near port or bay,
 And dashest him again to earth: there let him lay.²

The armaments which thunder-strike the walls
 Of rock-built cities, bidding nations quake,
 And monarchs tremble in their capitals,
 The oak leviathans,³ whose huge ribs make
 Their clay creator the vain title take
 Of lord of thee, and arbiter of war:
 These are thy toys, and, as the snowy flake,
 They melt into thy yeast of waves, which mar
 Alike the Armada's pride, or spoils of Trafalgar⁴,

¹ *Knell* = rintocco funebre.

² Forma arcaica per *lie*.

³ *Leviathan* grosso animale acquatico ricordato nella sacra scrittura (mostro marino).

⁴ Dopo la battaglia di Trafalgar la flotta inglese fu colta da una tempesta e le navi francesi che erano state prese andarono perdute.

Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee
Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?
Thy waters wasted them while they were free,
And many a tyrant since; their shores obey
The stranger, slave, or savage; their decay
Has dried up realms to deserts: not so thou;
Unchangeable, save to thy wild waves' play,
Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow:
Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
Glasses itself in tempests; in all time
Calm or convulsed — in breeze, or gale, or storm,
Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime
Dark-heaving; boundless, endless, and sublime —
The image of Eternity — the throne
Of the Invisible; even from out thy slime¹
The monsters of the deep are made; each zone
Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone.

And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy
Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be
Borne, like thy bubbles, onwards: from a boy
I wantoned with thy breakers — they to me
Were a delight; and if the freshening sea
Made them a terror — 'twas a pleasing fear;
For I was as it were a child of thee,
And trusted to thy billows far and near,
And laid my hand upon thy mane — as I do here.

¹ *Slime* = fondo limaccioso.

DARKNESS

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;
Morn came and went — and came, and brought no day,
And men forgot their passions in the dread
Of this their desolation; and all hearts
Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light:
And they did live by watchfires — and the thrones,
The palaces of crown'd kings — the huts,
The habitations of all things which dwell,¹
Were burnt for beacons; cities were consumed,
And men were gathered round their blazing homes
To look once more into each other's face;
Happy were those who dwelt within the eye
Of the volcanos, and their mountain-torch:²
A fearful hope was all the world contain'd;
Forests were set on fire — but hour by hour
They fell and faded — and the crackling trunks
Extinguish'd with a crash — and all was black.
The brows of men by the despairing light
Wore an unearthly aspect, as by fits
The flashes fell upon them, some lay down
And hid their eyes and wept; and some did rest
Their chins upon their clenched hands, and smiled;
And others hurried to and fro, and fed

¹ Che hanno dimora.

² *Mountain torch* = gigantesca torcia.

Their funeral piles with fuel, and look'd up
With mad disquietude on the dull sky,
The pall¹ of a past world; and then again
With curses cast them² down upon the dust,
And gnash'd their teeth and howl'd: the wild birds shriek'd
And, terrified, did flutter on the ground,
And flap their useless wings; the wildest brutes
Came tame and tremulous; and vipers crawl'd
And twined themselves among the multitude,
Hissing, but stingless — they were slain for food!
And War, which for a moment was no more,
Did glut himself again: — a meal was bought
With blood, and each sate sullenly apart
Gorging himself in gloom: no love was left;
All earth was but one thought — and that was death
Immediate and inglorious; and the pang
Of famine fed upon all entrails³ — men
Died, and their bones were tombless as their flesh;
The meagre by the meagre were devour'd;
Even dogs assail'd their masters, all save one,
And he was faithful to a corse, and kept.
The birds and beasts and famish'd men at bay,
Till hunger clung them,⁴ or the dropp'ing dead
Lured their lank jaws: himself sought out no food
But with a piteous and perpetual moan,
And a quick desolate cry, licking the hand
Which answer'd not with a caress — he died.
The crowd was famish'd by degrees; but two
Of an enormous city did survive,

¹ *Pall* = manto funebre.

² *Them* = *themselves*.

³ Consumò tutte le viscere.

⁴ Li avvinse, li rese immobili.

And they were enemies: they met beside
The dying embers of an altar-place
Where had been heap'd a mass of holy things
For an unholy usage; they raked up,
And shivering scraped with their cold skeleton hands
The feeble ashes and their feeble breath
Blew for a little life, and made a flame
Which was a mockery; then they lifted up
Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld
Each other's aspects — saw, and shriek'd, and died --
Even of their mutual hideousness they died,
Unknowing who he was upon whose brow
Famine had written Fiend. The world was void,
The populous and the powerful was a lump,
Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless,
A lump of death — a chaos of hard clay.
The rivers, lakes, and ocean all stood still,
And nothing stirr'd within their silent depths;
Ships sailorless lay rotting on the sea,
And their masts fell down piecemeal: as they dropp'd
They slept on the abyss without a surge —
The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave;
The moon, their mistress, had expired before;
The winds were wither'd in the stagnant air,
And the clouds perish'd; Darkness had no need
Of aid from them — She was the Universe.

THOMAS MOORE

1779-1852

Thomas Moore, l'amico e il biografo di Byron, nacque a Dublino, e sebbene di famiglia assai modesta ricevette buona istruzione al Trinity College della sua città. Nel 1799, dopo la ribellione irlandese di cui egli, come ardente nazionalista, si trovò sospettato partigiano e fautore, andò a Londra a studiar legge; ma più assai volentieri che di leggi si venne via via occupando sempre più appassionatamente di letteratura e di poesia. Fu bene accolto dalla alta società inglese per la sua arguta conversazione e la sua fine e profonda conoscenza della musica. Nel 1803 ottenne un lucroso ufficio alla Bermuda; ma, dopo essere andato a prenderne possesso, vi lasciò un incaricato e, dopo un viaggio per il Canada e gli Stati Uniti, se ne tornò in Inghilterra. Nel 1807 pubblicò le *Irish Melodies*, collezione di canti irlandesi accompagnati da musica. Il volume incontrò immensa popolarità, poichè, a non dire dei pregi intrinseci, toccava le corde più sensibili del patriottismo irlandese. Oggidì la fama del poeta vive soprattutto per questi suoi versi pieni di melodia, di delicato profumo, e di una melanconia dolce come quella d'un suono di campane che si perda nell'atmosfera di un roseo tramonto.

Le altre sue opere, *Lalla Rookh* (1817) lungo poema narrativo tessuto su di un ricco sfondo orientale, che godette molta fama a' suoi giorni, e *The Loves of the Angels*, pubblicati nel 1825, sono ora caduti in un oblio forse non del tutto meritato. Moore scrisse anche varie opere in prosa: la vita di *Byron*, di *Sheridan*, di *Lord Edward Fitzgerald*. La vita di Byron è la meglio riuscita, interessante soprattutto per il largo uso che l'autore vi fa della corrispondenza col Byron stesso. Il Moore morì nel febbraio del 1852.

del 1817 di Byron

ECHOES

How sweet the answer echo makes
To Music at night
When, roused by lute or horn, she wakes,
And far away o'er lawn and lakes
Goes answering light!

Yet Love hath echoes truer far
And far more sweet
Than e'er, beneath the moonlight's star,
Of horn or lute or soft guitar
The songs repeat.

'Tis when the sigh, — in youth sincere
And only then,
The sigh that's breathed for one to hear —
Is by that one, that only Dear
Breathed back again.

*
* *

At the mid hour of night, when stars are weeping, I fly
To the lone vale we loved, when life shone warm in
[thine eye;
And I think oft, if spirits can steal from the regions of air
To revisit past scenes of delight, thou wilt come to me
[there
And tell me our love is remember'd, even in the sky!
Then I sing the wild song it once was rapture to hear
When our voices, commingling, breathed like one on
[the ear;

And as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls,
I think, oh my Love! 'Tis thy voice, from the kingdom
[of Souls
Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear.

THE MEETING OF THE WATERS

There is not in the wide world a valley so sweet,
As that vale in whose bosom the bright waters meet;
Oh! the last rays of feeling and life must depart,
Ere the bloom of that valley shall fade from my heart.
Yet it was not that Nature had shed o'er the scene
Her purest of crystal and brightest of green;
'Twas not her soft magic of streamlet or hill,
Oh! no — it was something more exquisite still.
'Twas that friends, the beloved of my bosom, were near,
Who made every dear scene of enchantment more dear,
And who felt how the best charms of Nature improve
When we see them reflected from looks that we love.

*
* *

Believe me, if all those endearing young charms,
Which I gaze on so fondly to-day,
Were to change by to-morrow, and fleet in my arms,
Like fairy-gifts fading away,
Thou wouldst still be adored, as this moment thou art,
Let thy loveliness fade as it will,
And around the dear ruin each wish of my heart
Would entwine itself verdantly still.

It is not while beauty and youth are thine own,
And thy cheeks unprofaned by a tear,
That the fervour and faith of a soul can be known,
To which time will but make thee more dear.
No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close,
As the sun-flower turns on her god, when he sets,
The same look which she turned when he rose.

DEAR HARP OF MY COUNTRY!

Dear Harp of my Country! in darkness I found thee,
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long,
When proudly, my own Island Harp, I unbound thee,
And gave all thy chords to light, freedom, and song!
The warm lay of love and the light note of gladness
Have waken'd thy fondest, thy liveliest thrill.
But, so oft hast thou echo'd the deep sigh of sadness
That ev'n in thy mirth it will steal from thee still.

Dear Harp of my Country! farewell to thy numbers,
This sweet wreath of song is the last we shall twine!
Go, sleep with the sunshine of fame on thy slumbers
Till touch'd by some hand less unworthy than mine;
If the pulse of the patriot, soldier, or lover,
Have throbbed at our lay, 'tis thy glory alone;
I was but as the wind, passing heedlessly over,
And all the wild sweetness I wak'd was thy own.

From the « LIFE OF LORD BYRON »

His time at Annesley was mostly passed in riding with Miss Chaworth and her cousin, sitting in idle reverie, as was his custom, pulling at his handkerchief, or in firing at a door which opens upon the terrace, and which still, I believe, bears the marks of his shots. But his chief delight was in sitting to hear Miss Chaworth play; and the pretty Welsh air, '*Mary Anne*' was (partly, of course, on account of the name) his especial favourite. During all this time he had the pain of knowing that the heart of her he loved was occupied by another; — that, as he himself expresses it:

*'Her sighs were not for him: to her he was
Even as a brother — but no more'.*

Neither is it, indeed, probable, had even her affections been disengaged, that Lord Byron would, at this time, have been selected as the object of them. A seniority of two years gives to a girl, 'on the eve of Womanhood', an advance into life with which the boy keeps no proportionate pace. Miss Chaworth looked upon Byron as a mere schoolboy. He was in his manners, too, at that period, rough and odd, and (as I have heard from more than one quarter) by no means popular among girls of his own age. If, at any moment, however, he had flattered himself with the hope of being loved by her, a circumstance mentioned in his '*Memoranda*', as one of the most painful of those humiliations to which the defect in his foot had exposed him, must have let the truth in, with dreadful certainty upon his heart. He either was told of, or overheard, Miss Chaworth saying to her maid 'Do you think I could care any thing for that

lame boy? This speech, as he himself described it, was like a shot through his heart.

Though late at night when he heard it, he instantly darted out of the house, and scarcely knowing whither he ran, never stopped till he found himself at Newstead.

The picture which he has drawn of his youthful love in one of the most interesting of his poems 'The Dream' shows how genius and feeling can elevate the realities of this life, and give to the commonest events and objects an undying lustre. The old hall at Annesley, under the name of 'the antique oratory', will long call up to fancy the 'maiden and the youth' who once stood in it; while the image of the 'lover's steed' though suggested by the unromantic race-ground of Nottingham, will not the less conduce to the general charm of the scene, and share a portion of that light which only genius could shed over it.

He appears already, at this boyish age, to have been so far proficient in gallantry as to know the use that may be made of the trophies of former triumphs in achieving new ones, for he used to boast, with much pride, to Miss Chaworth, of a locket which some fair favourite had given him, and which probably may have been a present from that pretty cousin, of whom he speaks with such warmth in one of the notices already quoted. He was also, it appears, not a little aware of his own beauty, which notwithstanding the tendency to corpulence derived from his mother, gave promise, at this time, of that peculiar expression into which his features refined and kindled afterwards.

With the summer holidays ended this dream of his youth. He saw Miss Chaworth once more in the succeeding year and took his last farewell of her (as he himself used to relate) on that hill near Annesley, which, in

his poem of 'The Dream' he describes so happily as 'crowned with a peculiar diadem'. No one, he declared, could have told how *much* he felt — for his countenance was calm, and his feelings restrained. 'The next time I see you' said he in parting with her, 'I suppose you will be Mrs. Chaworth' — and her answer was, 'I hope so'. It was before this interview that he wrote, with a pencil, in a volume of Madame de Maintenon's letters belonging to her, the following verses, which have never, I believe, before been published: —

*Oh Memory, torture me no more
The present's all o'er-cast;
My hopes of future bliss are o'er,
In mercy veil the past;
Why bring those images to view
I henceforth must resign?
Ah! why those happy hours renew,
That never can be mine?
Past pleasure doubles present pain,
To sorrow adds regret,
Regret and hope are both in vain,
I ask but to — forget.*

In the following year, 1805, Miss Chaworth was married to his successful rival, Mr. John Musters; and a person who was present when the first intelligence of the event was communicated to him, thus describes the manner in which he received it.

— 'I was present when he first heard of the marriage. His mother said: Byron, I have some news for you. — Well, what is it? — Take out your handkerchief first, for you will want it. — Nonsense! — Take out your handkerchief, I say. He did so, to humour her. — Miss Chaworth is married.

JOHN KEATS

1795-1821

John Keats nacque a Londra nell'ottobre del 1795: suo padre, che teneva una rimessa di cavalli, morì quando egli era ancora fanciullo e pochi anni dopo perdette anche la madre. Fece i primi studi in una scuola privata a Enfield sotto la guida del rev. John Clarke, che gl'insegnò soltanto un po' di latino, ma acquistò una larga conoscenza della mitologia greca, leggendo molte traduzioni di classici e studiando il dizionario del Lemprière. La gioia che provò nel leggere la traduzione di Omero fatta dal Chapman, gl'ispirò il famoso sonetto *Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold*. A quindici anni andò come assistente presso un chirurgo a Edmonton, rimanendovi per quattro anni: tornava però di frequente a vedere i suoi amici di Enfield, e con Cowden Clarke, figlio del suo maestro, gli piaceva parlare di letteratura e leggere versi. Un giorno questi gli lesse un passo dello Spenser e gl'imprestò la *Fairie Queene*: Keats rimase incantato dalle bellezze specialmente di lingua di quel grande poema, e gli balenò in mente, per la prima volta, di scrivere versi.¹ Intanto aveva lasciato Edmonton, per recarsi a Londra ove continuò la pratica chirurgica negli ospedali; ma, sebbene attendesse con cura agli studi di anatomia, la sua mente era ormai desta al fascino della poesia, e già perseguiva altri e più gloriosi ideali. Nel maggio del 1817 scrive egli stesso 'di aver dimenticato tutta la sua chirurgia'. Avendo così stabilito di darsi tutto alle lettere, si unì a un gruppo di letterati illustri, di cui Leigh Hunt era il capo, i quali vagheggiavano tornare agli scrittori del secolo di Elisabetta.

¹ Cfr. SIDNEY COLVIN, *John Keats*, London, Macmillan, 1906, p. 13.

Questo rinato amore per i poeti elisabettiani fu in gran parte dovuto alla pubblicazione di Charles Lamb, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* (1808), libro che fu letto e studiato con grande ardore dai poeti della nuova scuola.

All'ammirazione per i romantici elisabettiani si unì in Keats quella non meno grande per l'arte greca, di cui vide gli splendidi frammenti, i famosi avanzi del Partenone, allora donati da Lord Elgin al Museo Britannico. Ritiratosi per qualche tempo alle verdi solitudini dell'isola di Wight per studiare e meditare, compose il suo primo poema, *Endymion*, che pubblicò a Londra nel 1818. Nella prefazione avverte egli stesso il lettore esser questa opera di « molta inesperienza, immatura, ove ogni errore indica un febbrile tentativo piuttosto che un fatto compiuto ». Ma non valse la modestia del poeta a salvarlo dalle aspre critiche del *Blackwood Magazine*, che trascinò fino a offenderlo volgarmente: « so back to the shop, Mr. John, stick to plasters, pills, ointment boxes etc. »; e della *Quarterly Review*, che lo accusava di essere imitatore servile di Hunt, e due volte più prolisso e faticoso di lui. Si credette in quei giorni che Keats rimanesse ferito profondamente da quelle critiche, e Byron nel *Don Juan* e Shelley nell'*Adonais*, facendosi eco di queste voci, diedero consistenza alla leggenda che le critiche ingiuste e crudeli delle due autorevoli riviste fossero la ragione prima della morte precoce del poeta. Dalle sue lettere si vede invece chiaramente che egli sopportò le accuse con molta filosofia: sebbene di carattere superbo, non aveva una vanità troppo suscettibile, e, conscio del suo genio, poteva bene sprezzare le critiche malevole e ingiuste che sentiva di non meritare. Egli risponde infatti a chi gli scrive incoraggiandolo: « Lode e biasimo non fanno che un'impressione momentanea su chi dal proprio amore per la bellezza ideale è reso critico severo delle proprie opere. La mia stessa intima critica mi ha dato pena senza confronto maggiore di quella che il *Blackwood* e la *Quarterly* potessero procurarmi ». ¹

¹ Lettera all'Hessey riportata dal COLVIN: op. cit., p. 126.

L'*Endymion*, sebbene abbia alcuni difetti dovuti alla giovinezza e inesperienza del poeta, soprattutto la troppa profusione, e manchi del freno dell'arte, contiene dei passi e degli episodi di grande bellezza. Nel febbraio del 1818 scrisse un altro poemetto, *Isabella or the Pot of Basil*, il cui soggetto è preso dalla nota novella del Boccaccio.¹ Più grande si sente qui la potenza creativa del poeta, mentre l'esuberanza fantastica è già disciplinata dall'arte fatta ormai sicura. Bellissime son le prime stanze, nelle quali è descritto l'amore nascente di Isabella per Lorenzo e il loro primo incontro:

*"Love: thou art leading me from wintry cold,
Lady! thou ledest me to summer clime,
And I must taste the blossoms that unfold
In its ripe warmth this gracious morning time".
So said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold,
And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme:
Great bliss was with them, and great happiness
Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress.*

*Parting they seem'd to tread upon the air,
Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart
Only to meet again more close, and share
The inward fragrance of each other's heart...*

Bellissime son pure quelle ove Isabella piange sul vaso di basilico:

*And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not: but in peace
Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.*

¹ DECAMERONE, giornata IV; nov. 5.

L'anno dopo, ritornato da un giro a piedi per la Scozia, che assai peggiorò la sua salute, scrisse *The Eve of St. Agnes*, fiorito racconto d'amore, ricco di colore e di suoni e di vaghiissime immagini, e *Lamia*, forse il più perfetto dei suoi poemi. Intanto era venuto componendo a sbalzi *Hyperion*, la maggiore delle sue opere, rimasta incompiuta, e le cinque grandi odi di perfetta bellezza, che da sole basterebbero a farlo annoverare tra i sommi del Parnaso inglese: l'*Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *To a Nightingale*, *On Melancholy*, *To Psyche*, *To Autumn*, finchè la salute sempre più declinante non rese muta quella voce meravigliosa.

L'etisia, malattia di famiglia, lo aveva preso nelle sue strette inesorabili, nè doveva più lasciarlo. Ad aggravare il suo stato s'aggiunse il tormentoso amore per Miss Fanny Browne, che il poeta aveva conosciuto a Hampstead e con la quale si era fidanzato, sebbene non ci fosse alcuna speranza che le nozze potessero mai avvenire. Ebbe sbocchi di sangue; e ormai, presentendo la morte imminente, scriveva che la malattia gli faceva percepire le cose in una luce più vera, e che il dover lasciare il mondo gli dava un nuovo senso delle bellezze naturali... 'medito con la più gran tenerezza su ogni fiore che ho conosciuto dalla mia infanzia — le loro forme e colori mi riescono così nuovi come se io li avessi or ora creati con una fantasia sovrumana'.

Consigliato dai medici, partì per l'Italia, accompagnato dall'amico Severn. A bordo del bastimento scrisse il suo ultimo sonetto, canto d'amore e di morte, che pose in un volume di Shakspeare sotto il titolo *A Lover's Complaint*. A Roma parve riaversi, ma fu breve illusione, e ormai il poeta non desiderava più che la morte. 'Io sento', diceva, 'crescere i fiori sopra di me'; e senza alcuna amarezza dettò il suo epitaffio: « Qui giace uno il cui nome fu scritto nell'acqua ». Spirò tranquillo tra le braccia dell'amico Severn a soli venticinque anni. Fu sepolto nel cimitero degli Inglesi presso la piramide di Caio Cestio.

« Pace! pace! Egli non è morto! Egli non dorme! Egli si è destato dal sonno della vita! — È trasvolato oltre l'oscurità

della nostra notte: invidia e calunnia, odio e pena, e quell'inquietudine che gli uomini chiamano piacere, non possono toccarlo nè tormentarlo mai più». ¹

Mori senza essere apprezzato neanche dai grandi poeti suoi contemporanei; solo dopo la sua morte si comprese tutta la grandezza di un'opera compiuta da un genio tanto precoce quanto meraviglioso. L'elemento primo, la nota dominante del carattere e della poesia di Keats è il piacere, il culto della bellezza: la sua stessa melanconia, scrive W. M. Rossetti, ² è la voluttà della tristezza; la sua disperazione è la coppa dell'estasi rovesciata e vuota. La sua poesia fu pagana ed ellenica per intuizione: essa sbocciò spontanea dalla sua anima senza cultura e senza insegnamento. L'universo non è abbastanza bello per lui: gli occorre una vita che sia un'estasi continua, e melodie più dolci di quelle che l'orecchio umano possa udire, e canti che non abbiano mai fine, un amore, una bellezza che il tempo non appassisca mai. ³ 'Oh ritorna, poesia degli antichi giorni! che l'immaginazione ti riconduca ne' suoi laberinti fioriti! I poeti re saran quelli che sapranno dire semplicemente le cose più dolci! O possa io vedere maturare queste gioie dello spirito prima che io muoia! ⁴

La poesia di Keats ha bellezza e delicatezza in sommo grado: vi son fiori, nubi, archi baleni, chiari di luna, tutti i suoni e tutti i profumi della primavera: vi manca solo il calore intenso dell'estate. Egli ebbe grande influenza sull'arte poesia e sull'arte vittoriana; Tennyson e Browning, che nella fanciullezza furono affascinati da Byron, in gioventù da Shelley, giunti alla virilità, studiarono Keats, la cui influenza sulla poesia inglese dal 1830 in poi non fu meno universale di quella di Byron nella letteratura del continente. ⁵

¹ SHELLEY, *Adonais*, xxxix.

² W. M. ROSSETTI, *J. Keats*, London, 1887.

³ Cfr. J. KEATS, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

⁴ J. KEATS, *Sleep and Poetry*.

⁵ Cfr. E. GOSSE, *Modern English Literature*, p. 307.

*
* *

To one who has been long in city pent,¹
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
And open face of heaven, — to breathe a prayer
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.
Who is more happy, when, with heart's content,
Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair
Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair
And gentle tale of love and languishment?
Returning home at evening, with an ear
Catching the notes of Philomel, — an eye
Watching the sailing cloudlet's bright career,
He mourns that day so soon has glided by,
E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
That falls through the clear ether silently.

TO A NIGHTINGALE ²

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness ³ pains
My sense, as though of hemlock ⁴ I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains ⁵
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk: ⁶
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,

¹ Rinchiuso.

² Nella primavera del 1819 un usignolo fabbricò il suo nido su di un susino vicino alla casa ove dimorava Keats. Una mattina il poeta dopo colazione si sedette sotto il susino dove rimase per due o tre ore. Tornò poi a casa con alcuni fogli in mano e subito dopo riordinatili ne trasse questa ode mirabile. Il Keats ha qualche somiglianza psichica col Leopardi. Si ricordi il passero solitario del nostro poeta.

³ Sonno lento stupore.

⁴ Cicuta.

⁵ Sino a l'ultima stilla.

⁶ Mi fossi immerso nelle onde di Lete.

on just a minute ago

But being too happy in thy happiness, — *through my being*
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.²

O for a draught of vintage, that hath been *f*
 Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
 Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
 Dance, and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth!³
 O for a beaker full of the warm South,
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,⁴
 With beaded bubbles⁵ winking at the brim,
 And purple-stained mouth;
 That I might drink and leave the world unseen,
 And with thee fade away into the forest dim:⁶ *fade light*

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs, *paralysis*
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs;
 Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous⁷ eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them⁸ beyond to-morrow.

¹ Trama.

² A piena agile gola.

³ L'allegria sotto il cocente sole.

⁴ Ippocrene; fonte sul monte Elicone sacra alle muse.

⁵ Bolle, spuma.

⁶ Questa ode fu scritta quando il poeta, già malato di petto, sentiva vicina la sua fine.

⁷ Luminosi. *shining*

⁸ Struggersi in pianto per essi.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
 Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
 Already with thee! tender is the night,
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
 Clustered around by all her starry Fays,¹
 But here there is no light,
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.²

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon³ the boughs
 But, in embalmed⁴ darkness, guess each sweet⁵
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child;⁶
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling⁷ I listen; and for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful⁸ Death,
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,

¹ Fate.

² Sentieri

³ Pende.

⁴ Profumata.

⁵ Dolce cosa, dono.

⁶ Cioè l'ultima fiorita.

⁷ Nell'oscurità.

⁸ Placida.

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain *would have*
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path *it is*
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;¹
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.²

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self.³ *Pr: toll*
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat⁴ so well
 As she is famed to do, deceiving elf,
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem⁵ fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?⁶
 Fled is that music: — do I wake or sleep?

¹ Messi altrui.

² Ha rapito in estasi (le belle) ai magici balconi aprentisi sulle spume di perigliosi mari negli ora abbandonati paesi delle fate. Versi famosi che ogni inglese sa a memoria.

³ Che mi richiama con suono lugubre da te a me stesso.

⁴ Ingannarci, prendersi giuoco di noi.

⁵ Canto.

⁶ Sogno della veglia?

ODE TO AUTUMN¹ *f. 112 flower of England*

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,²
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
 Conspiring³ with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
 To swell the gourd,⁴ and plump the hazel shells
 With a sweet kernel;⁵ to set budding more,
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,
 Until they think warm days will never cease;
 For Summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy⁶ cells. (11)

Who has not seen thee oft amid thy store?⁷
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad⁸ may find
 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;⁹
 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
 Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

¹ Fu l'ultimo scritto del Keats e ricorda i giorni tranquilli di settembre passati dal poeta a Winchester. Altro capolavoro, dice il Palgrave, degno di Teocrito.

² *Mellow* = maturo, molle; *mellow fruitfulness* = dolci frutti maturi.

³ Con lui ti accordi.

⁴ Zucca.

⁵ Dolce sostanza.

⁶ Viscose.

⁷ Messi.

⁸ Erri, vaghi intorno.

⁹ *To winnow*, vuol dire *séparer* la pula dal grano per mezzo del vento; il vento alzava leggermente i capelli della fanciulla.

(11) There should somewhere an exclamation note!
 the same in flower of England; Chelley-Keats; letter
 Hughes

Spares the next swath¹ and all its twined flowers;
 And sometimes like a gleaner² thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
 Or by a cyder-press,³ with patient look,
 Thou watchest the last oozings,⁴ hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, —
 While barred⁵ clouds bloom⁶ the soft-dying day
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy-hue;
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river-sallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;⁷
 Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft
 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

*
* *

Jan., 1817.

After dark vapours⁸ have oppress'd our plains
 For a long dreary season, comes a day
 Born of the gentle South, and clears away
 From the sick⁹ heavens all unseemly stains.¹⁰

¹ *Swath*, l'erba o il grano che può esser tagliato con un giro di falce.

² *Gleaner* = chi raccoglie il grano dopo che questo è stato mietuto.

³ *Cyder* = succo di mele, usato come bevanda; *press* = strizzo.

⁴ *Stille*, gocce.

⁵ *A* striscie.

⁶ *Bloom* = adornano con colori simili a quelli dei fiori.

⁷ Colline che limitano l'orizzonte; circostanti colline.

⁸ Bruni vapori, le nebbie.

⁹ Stanchi, malati.

¹⁰ Brutte macchie.

The anxious month, relieved from its pains,
 Takes as a long-lost right the feel ¹ of May,
 The eye-lids with the passing coolness play,
 Like rose-leaves with the drip of summer rains.
 And calmest thoughts come round us — as of leaves
 Budding — fruit ripening in stillness — autumn suns
 Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves, ² —
 Sweet Sappho's cheek, — a sleeping infant's breath, —
 The gradual ³ sand that through an hour-glass ⁴ runs, —
 A woodland rivulet, -- a Poet's death.

From 'ENDYMION' ⁵

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever
 Its loveliness increases; ⁶ it will never
 Pass into nothingness; ⁷ but still will keep
 A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
 Full of sweet dreams, and health and quiet breathing.
 Therefore on every morrow we are wreathing
 A flowery band to bind us to the earth
 Spite of the despondence of the inhuman dearth ⁸
 Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,

¹ La carezza.

² Covoni.

³ Lenta.

⁴ Clessidra.

⁵ Con questi bellissimi versi, vero inno alla bellezza, comincia il poema 'Endymion'. Dalla pagina meravigliosa in lode della bellezza nel tempestoso Tamerlano del Marlowe, dall'inno alla bellezza intellettuale dello Shelley, dalle pagine superbe del Ruskin a questo sublime canto di Keats quanta bellezza, quanta musica, quanto ideale diede agli uomini la profonda anima inglese!

⁶ Cresce di continuo.

⁷ Nulla.

⁸ Dolorosa rarità, penuria.

Of all the unhealthy and o'erdarkened ways
Made for our searching: ¹ yes, in spite of all
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such ^{1 are} the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon ²
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world thy live in; and clear rills ^{1 e}
That for themselves a cooling cover make
¹ Gainst the hot seasons; the mid-forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk rose blooms;
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms ³
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
Of lovely tales that we have heard or read
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto ⁴ us from the heaven's brink.

¹ Che dobbiamo seguire.

² Che crescendo fanno gradita ombra.

³ Destini.

⁴ Che cade su di noi.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

1792-1822

Percy Bysshe Shelley nacque a Field Place, vicino a Horsham nella contea di Sussex, da antica e ricca famiglia di gentiluomini di campagna. Trascorse la fanciullezza nel maniero avito di Field Place finchè non andò alla scuola di Brentford, dove il fanciullo, racconta il suo condiscipolo e futuro biografo Medwin, bello come un angelo e di carattere dolce, passava gran parte del tempo a sognare, guardando le nubi mentre veleggiavano attraverso le finestre della scuola, e a disegnare schizzi degli abeti e dei cedri della sua casa a Field Place.¹ Nel 1804 passò a Eton, e là si cominciò a manifestare il suo spirito libero e indipendente in aperta ribellione contro la tirannia e l'oppressione dei compagni più grandi (è risaputo che la disciplina degli alunni più piccoli è affidata a Eton alle cure degli alunni maggiori di età) e la pedanteria dei maestri. Sebbene male si piegasse a seguire il corso regolare degli studi, imparò le lingue classiche quasi per intuizione, lesse gran numero di romanzi, e si appassionò per la fisica e la chimica. Dopo sei anni di collegio, entrò nel 1810 all'Università di Oxford. Ebbe per amico il compagno Thomas Jefferson

¹¹ Hogg, altro suo prezioso biografo, che ci dipinge in pochi tratti felici lo strano fanciullo. « In nessuno il senso morale era più compiutamente sviluppato che in Shelley; nessuno aveva più acuta la percezione di ciò che è giusto e di ciò che è ingiusto. Come vivo era il suo amore per le occupazioni della mente e quasi celeste la potenza del suo genio,

¹ MEDWIN, *Life of Shelley*, Newby, 1847.

¹¹ in 1832 contributed to Bulwer's *New Monthly Magazine: the reminiscences of Shelley*. Afterwards he wrote two volumes of a commissioned biography

così era grande la purezza e la santità della sua vita ». Pure questo amore per tutto ciò che gli sembrava bello e giusto lo condusse a fare molte cose che urtarono il senso morale della società d'allora.

(1811)

Persuasosi della necessità dell'ateismo, credette conveniente pubblicare le sue idee in un opuscolo *The Necessity of Atheism*, che provocò la sua espulsione dall'Università di Oxford. Andò a Londra, e visitando le sorelle che erano in collegio, conobbe una loro compagna, Miss Harriet Westbrook, ragazza di sedici anni, figlia di un caffettiere in ritiro e lo Shelley la convertì alle sue idee convincendola della immoralità del matrimonio. Ma innamoratosene volle onorevolmente sposarla, con grande indignazione di suo padre nemico dichiarato di ogni *mésalliance*, che lo abbandonò a se stesso. Dopo tre anni di vita errante per parecchie città e dopo una visita a Dublino dove gli Shelley fecero propaganda delle loro idee riformatrici e rivoluzionarie, i due giovani ritornarono a Londra. Poco dopo lo Shelley, per varie ragioni, si divisé dalla moglie, e partì per la Svizzera con Miss Godwin, ragazza di molto ingegno e coltura, che sposò due anni dopo, e che gli fu affezionata e degna compagna.

(1813)

Finora lo Shelley non aveva scritto che un poema, *Queen Mab*, opera immatura e guasta da molta retorica che ebbe un successo di scandalo, poichè il poeta vi espone le sue idee rivoluzionarie sulla religione e sulle istituzioni sociali. L'opera che rivelò la grandezza del suo genio fu *Alastor*, poema allegorico scritto nel 1816 in magnifici versi sciolti degni di Milton, vano tentativo come lo chiama lui stesso 'di cercare la bellezza ideale in qualche forma terrena'. Dopo un viaggio in Svizzera dove conobbe Byron, lo Shelley tornò (1817) in Inghilterra dove scrisse *The Revolt of Islam*, serie splendida di canti che rappresenta tutte le sue aspirazioni, la sua fede nell'amicizia, nella rigenerazione dell'umanità, la dottrina del libero amore, l'odio alla tirannide. Cominciò in questo torno di tempo anche *Rosalind and Helen*, che doveva poi terminare in Italia, dove passò i quattro ultimi anni della vita e dove scrisse tutte le opere che lo fecero

immortale. Le lettere che mandò all'amico Peacock durante la sua dimora nelle varie città italiane sono i più belli esempi di prosa descrittiva, sobria e colorita, che abbia la letteratura inglese. L'anno dopo a Roma compose il suo più gran poema, *Prometheus Unbound*, (andava a scriverlo alle Terme di Caracalla), radiante visione di futura felicità, che sembra effettuare il sogno di far musica con le parole, e *I Cenci*, il più grande dramma scritto in inglese dopo Shakspeare, l'unico lavoro relativamente popolare che ebbe due edizioni durante la vita del poeta. A Pisa dove lo Shelley si recò nel 1820, parve finalmente sorridergli la vita: dalle sue lettere si vede come stesse raccogliendo forze per nuovi e più ardui voli. Nell'estate e nell'autunno compose infatti alcune delle sue cose più belle: l'*Ode to a Skylark*, *The Witch of Atlas*, canto di settantotto stanze scritto in tre giorni, miracolo di fantasia, brillante ragnatela, dice il Symonds, sospesa alle corna della luna e lasciata lassù fluttuante al vento; *The Sensitive Plant*, suggerita dai molti fiori che ornavano il salotto della signora Shelley, e l'*Epipsichidion*, sacro canto d'amore ispiratogli da Emilia Viviani, fanciulla che conobbe a Pisa, della quale il poeta fa l'incarnazione della bellezza ideale. La notizia della morte di Keats gli dettò la grande elegia *Adonais*, nell'ultima stanza della quale appare la strana profezia della sua prossima fine:

*The breath ¹ whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The mossy earth and spherèd skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.*

¹ Cioè il vento occidentale, che per Shelley, personifica lo spirito dell' Universo.

Nell'estate del 1822, ultimo della sua vita, Shelley abbandonava Pisa per stabilirsi a Villa Magni, sul golfo di Spezia. Edoardo Shuré che studiò con molto amore lo stato d'animo del poeta in quel tempo, ce lo descrive ormai sdegnoso della vita e più vago d'affrontare i misteri della morte. Scriveva infatti al suo amico Trelawny, domandandogli un potente veleno. 'Non è che io abbia per ora intenzione di uccidermi, — gli scriveva —, ma amo avere con me la chiave che possa aprirmi gli splendidi regni dell'eterno silenzio'. L'otto luglio, spiegate le bianche vele dell'Ariele, leggera navicella sulla quale passava gran parte della giornata, si diresse a Livorno per rivedere l'amico Leigh Hunt e il Trelawny; al ritorno fosche nubi si addensavano sul cielo, e, scoppiata una breve ma violenta tempesta, la fragile navicella si capovolse e Shelley peri fra le onde. Il suo corpo fu arso sulla riva del mare in presenza di Byron, Leigh Hunt e Trelawny; le ceneri, chiuse in un'urna, furono trasportate a Roma e poste nel cimitero inglese, ove 'la morte sorride col sorriso d'amore'.

L'urna dello Shelley ispirò al Carducci una delle sue elegie più profonde di pensiero e di sentimento. Immagina che in un'isola, sorgente dai mari della serena fantasia, sia finalmente attuato per chi ne è degno il sogno del Cuor de' cuori, l'ideale — scrive Ugo Brilli — del Poeta del rinnovato mondo, intravisto fuori del tempo e dello spazio, fuori della contingenza della vita effimera, nella realtà spirituale del mistero infinito.⁴

O lontana a le vie dei duri mortali travagli,
isola de le belle, isola de gli eroi,

isola de' poeti! Biancheggia l'oceano d'intorno,
volano uccelli strani per il purpureo cielo.

Passa crollando i lauri l'immensa sonante epopea
come turbin di maggio sopra ondeggianti piani;

⁴ *Nel mondo lirico di Giosue Carducci*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1911, pag. 126.

o come quando Wagner possente mille anime intona
a i cantanti metalli; trema a gli umani il core.

Oh, ma non ivi alcuno de' novi poeti mai surse
se non tu forse, Shelley, spirito di titano,

entro virginee forme: dal divo complesso di Teti
Sofocle a volo tolse te fra gli eroici cori.

O cuor de' cuori, sopra quest'urna che freddo ti chiude
odora e tepe e brilla la primavera in fiore.

O cuor de' cuori, il sole divino padre ti avvolge
de' suoi raggianti amori, povero muto cuore.

Fremono freschi i pini per l'aura grande di Roma:
tu dove sei, poeta del liberato mondo?

A me pare che tutta l'essenza, per così dire, dell'idealismo e della poesia di Shelley sia colto dal Carducci nel distico

L'ora presente è in vano, non fa che percuotere e fugge;
sol nel passato è il bello, sol ne la morte è il vero.¹

Non compreso o ignorato durante la sua vita, Shelley è oggi con consenso unanime della critica europea riconosciuto il più alto poeta lirico dell'ottocento, l'incarnazione stessa della poesia lirica, il vero poeta dei poeti. Potrà discutersi delle sue idee, della sua filosofia; ma per i voli sublimi della immaginazione, la musica varia melodiosa del ritmo che risponde ad ogni mutar di passione, la gloria delle parole che sembra abbiano tutti i colori di una splendida primavera, lo Shelley non ha eguali tra i poeti del suo paese, e forse del mondo.

¹ È pure assai notevole la prefazione del Carducci alla traduzione del *Prometeo liberato* di Ettore Sanfelice; prefazione riprodotta, con aggiunte, in *Prose*, pag. 1237, e che espone brevemente la storia della fortuna dello Shelley in Italia. *Dove alcuni traduttori sono ricordati con un figure, e non è detto chi sia G. A.*

ARIETTE

As the moon's soft splendour
O'er the faint cold starlight of heaven
Is thrown,
So thy voice most tender
To the strings without soul has given
Its own.

The stars will awaken,
Though the moon sleep a full hour later
To-night:
No leaf will be shaken
Whilst the dews of thy melody scatter
Delight.

Though the sound overpowers,
Sing again, with thy sweet voice revealing
A tone
Of some world far from ours,
Where music and moonlight and feeling
Are one.

THE INDIAN SERENADE

I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright.
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Has led me — who knows how?
To thy chamber window, sweet!

The wandering airs they faint
On the dark, the silent stream —
The champak odours fail
Like sweet thoughts in a dream;
The nightingale's complaint
It dies upon her heart,
As I must die on thine,
O beloved as thou art!

O lift me from the grass!
I die, I faint, I fail!
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast,
Oh! press it close to thine again,
Where it will break at last.

MUSIC

I pant for the music which is divine,
My heart in its thirst is a dying flower;
Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine
Loosen the notes in a silver shower;
Like a herbless plain for the gentle rain,
I gasp, I faint, till they wake again —

Let me drink of the spirit of that sweet sound,
More, O more! — I am thirsting yet!
It loosens the serpent which care has bound
Upon my heart, to stifle it;
The dissolving strain, through every vein,
Passes into my heart and brain.

As the scent of a violet withered up,
Which grew by the brink of a silver lake,
When the hot noon has drained its dewy cup,
And mist there was none its thirst to slake —
And the violet lay dead while the odour flew
On the wings of the wind o'er the waters blue:

As one who drinks from a charmed cup
Of foaming, and sparkling, and murmuring wine,
Whom a mighty enchantress, filling up,
Invites to love with her kiss divine —

To —

When passion's trance is overpast,
If tenderness and truth could last
Or live, whilst all wild feelings keep
Some mortal slumber, dark and deep,
I should not weep, I should not weep!

It were enough to feel, to see
Thy soft eyes gazing tenderly,
And dream the rest — and burn and be
The secret food of fires unseen,
Couldst thou but be as thou hast been.

After the slumber of the year
The woodland violets reappear
All things revive in field or grove,
And sky and sea, but two, which move,
And for all others, life and love.

THE RECOLLECTION

I

Now the last day of many days
All beautiful and bright as thou,
The loveliest and the last, is dead,
Rise, Memory, and write its praise!
Up — to thy wonted work! come, trace
The epitaph of glory fled, —
For now the Earth has changed its face,
A frown is on the Heaven's brow.

II

We wandered to the Pine Forest
That skirts the Ocean's foam;
The lightest wind was in its nest,
The tempest in its home. —
The whispering waves were half asleep,
The clouds were gone to play,
And on the bosom of the deep
The smile of Heaven lay;
It seemed as if the hour were one
Sent from beyond the skies,
Which scattered from above the sun
A light of Paradise.

III

We paused amid the pines¹ that stood
The giants of the waste,
Tortured by storms to shapes as rude
As serpents interlaced,
And soothed by every azure breath
That under heaven is blown
To harmonies and hues beneath
As tender as its own;
Now all the tree-tops lay asleep
Like green waves on the sea,
As still as in the silent deep
The ocean woods may be.

IV

How calm it was! — The silence there
By such a chain was bound
That even the busy woodpecker
Made stiller with her sound
The inviolable quietness;
The breath of peace we drew
With its soft motion made not less
The calm that round us grew.
There seemed, from the remotest seat
Of the wide mountain waste,

¹ La famosa pineta di Ravenna che Shelley visitò insieme a Byron l'anno prima che scrivesse questa poesia.

To the soft flower beneath our feet
A magic circle traced,
A spirit interfused around,
A thrilling silent life,
To momentary peace it bound
Our mortal nature's strife; —
And still I felt, the centre of
The magic circle there
Was one fair form that filled with love
The lifeless atmosphere. —

V

We paused beside the pools that lie
Under the forest bough,
Each seemed as 'twere a little sky
Gulfed in a world below;
A firmament of purple light
Which in the dark earth lay
More boundless than the depth of night
And purer than the day —
In which the lovely forests grew —
As in the upper air,
More perfect both in shape and hue
Than any spreading there.
There lay the glade, the neighbouring lawn,
And through the dark-green wood
The white sun twinkling like the dawn
Out of a speckled cloud.
Sweet views which in our world above
Can never well be seen
Were imaged by the water's love
Of that fair forest green.

And all was interfused beneath
With an Elysian glow,
An atmosphere without a breath,
A softer day below.
Like one beloved, the scene had lent
To the dark water's breast
Its every leaf and lineament
With more than truth expressed;
Until an envious wind crept by,
Like an unwelcome thought
Which from the mind's too faithful eye
Blots one dear image out.
Though thou art ever fair and kind
The forests ever green
Less oft is peace in Shelley's mind
Than calm in waters seen.

THE SENSITIVE PLANT

Part I

A Sensitive Plant in a garden grew,
And the young winds fed it with silver dew,
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light,
And closed them beneath the kisses of night.

And the spring arose on the garden fair,¹
Like the spirit of Love felt everywhere;
And each flower and herb on earth's dark breast
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.

¹ Vago.

But none ever trembled and panted with bliss¹
In the garden, the field, or the wilderness
Like a doe in the noon-tide with love's sweet want,
As the companionless Sensitive Plant.

The Snowdrop, and then the violet,
Arose from the ground with warm rain wet;
And their breath was mixed with fresh odours sent
From the turf, like the voice and the instrument.

Then the pied² wind-flowers³ and the tulip tall
And narcissi, the fairest among them all,
Who gaze on their eyes in the stream's recess
Till they die of their own dear loveliness;⁴

And the Naiad-like, lily of the vale,
Whom youth makes so fair, and passion so pale,
That the light of its tremulous bells⁵ is seen
Through their pavilions of tender green;

And the hyacinth, purple, and white, and blue,
Which flung from its bells a sweet peal anew⁶
Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,
It was felt like an odour within the sense;

And the rose, like a nymph to the bath addressed,
Which unveiled the depth of her glowing breast,⁷
Till, fold after fold, to the fainting air
The soul of her beauty and love lay bare;

¹ Palpitò di gioia.

² Screziato.

³ Anemone.

⁴ Come Narciso.

⁵ Tremule campanule.

⁶ Di continuo.

⁷ Seno ardente.

And the wand-like¹ lily, which lifted up,
As a Maenad,² its moonlight-coloured cup,
Till the fiery star³ which is its eye
Gazed through clear dew on the tender sky;

And the jessamine faint, and the sweet tuberose —
The sweetest flower for scent that blows —
And all rare blossoms from every clime,
Grew in that garden in perfect prime.

And on the stream whose inconstant bosom
Was pranked⁴ under boughs of embowering blossom,⁵
With golden and green light slanting through⁶
Their heaven of many a tangled hue,⁷

Broad water-lilies lay tremulously,
And starry river-buds glimmered by;
And around them the soft stream did glide and dance
With a motion of sweet sound and radiance.

And the sinous paths of lawn and of moss
Which led through the garden along and across,
Some open at once to the sun and the breeze
Some lost among bowers of blossoming trees,

¹ Simile a una verghetta.

² Menade, baccante.

³ Accesa stella (stamina di color giallo che è in fondo al calice del fiore).

⁴ Adorno.

⁵ Sotto rami di fiori che formavano un padiglione.

⁶ Che penetrava obliqua attraverso.

⁷ Di molte tinte confuse.

Were all paved with daisies and delicate bells
As fair as the fabulous asphodels¹ .
And flowerets which, drooping as day drooped too
Fell into pavilions, white, purple and blue
To roof the glow-worm from the evening dew.

And from this undefiled Paradise
The flowers, (as an infant's awaking eyes
Smile on its mother, whose singing sweet
Can first lull and at last must awaken it),

When heaven's blithe winds had unfolded them
As mine-lamps enkindle a hidden gem,
Shone smiling to heaven and every one
Shared joy in the light of the gentle sun; —

For each one was interpenetrated
With the light and the odour its neighbour shed,
Like young lovers whom youth and love make dear
Wrapped and filled by their mutual atmosphere.

But the Sensitive Plant, which could give small fruit
Of the love which it felt from the leaf to the root
Received more than all: it loved more than ever,
Where none wanted but it, could belong to the giver.² —

For the Sensitive Plant has no bright flower;
Radiance and odour are not its dower;
It loves even like Love, — its deep heart is full;
It desires what it has not, the beautiful. —

¹ Si credeva che l'asfodelo fosse immortale.

² Amava più che mai non potessero gli altri fiori poichè essa sola manca di bellezza e profumo.

The light winds which from unsustaining¹ wings
Shed the music of many murmurings;
The beams which dart from many a star
Of the flowers whose hues they bear afar;

The plumed insects swift and free
Like golden boats on a sunny sea,
Laden with light and odour, which pass
Over the gleam of the living grass;

The unseen clouds of the dew which lie
Like fire in the flowers, till the sun rides high,
Then wander like spirits among the spheres
Each cloud faint with the fragrance it bears

The quivering vapours of dim² noontide,
Which like a sea o'er the warm earth glide,
In which every sound and odour and beam
Move as reeds in a single stream;

Each and all like ministering angels were
For the Sensitive Plant sweet joy to bear,
Whilst the lagging hours of the day went by,
Like the windless clouds o'er a tender sky.

And, when evening descended from heaven above,
And the earth was all rest, and the air was all love,
And delight, though less bright, was far more deep,
And the day's veil fell from the world of sleep,

¹ Non atte a sostenerla.

² Nebuloso.

And the beasts and the birds and the insects were drowned
In a ocean of dreams without a sound,
Whose waves never mark though they ever impress
The light sand, which paves it, consciousness;

(Only overhead the sweet nightingale
Ever sang more sweet as the day might fail,
And snatches of its elysian chant
Were mixed with the dream of the Sensitive Plant);

The Sensitive Plant was the earliest
Up gathered into the bosom of rest;
A sweet child weary of its delight,
The feeblest and yet the favourite
Cradled within the embrace of night.

TIME LONG PAST ¹

Like the ghost of a dear friend dead
Is time long past.
A tone ² which is now forever fled,
A hope which is now forever past,
A love so sweet it could not last,
Was time long past.

There were sweet dreams in the night
Of time long past:
And, was it sadness or delight,
Each day a shadow onward cast
Which made us wish it yet might last —
That time long past.

¹ Tempo che fu.

² Una voce.

There is regret, almost remorse,
 For time long past.
 'Tis like a child's belovèd corse¹,
 A father watches, till at last
 Beauty is like remembrance cast
 From time long past.

To —

Music, when soft voices die,
 Vibrates in the memory —
 Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
 Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
 Are heaped for the beloved's bed;
 And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
 Love itself shall slumber on.

TO THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

(From '*Letters from Italy*'²)

My dear Peacock,

Rome, March 23 d, 1819.

I wrote to you the day before our departure from Naples. We came by slow journeys, with our own horses, to Rome, resting one day at Mola di Gaeta, at the inn called Villa di Cicerone, from being built on the ruins of his Villa, whose immense substructions overhang the sea, and are scattered among the orange-groves. Nothing

¹ *Corse* forma poetica di *corpse* = corpo (cadavere).

² Le '*Lettere dall'Italia*' dello Shelley sono pubblicate nel secondo volume delle *Prose Works* di Shelley edite da R. H. Shepherd (Chatto and Windus, London, 1906).

can be lovelier than the scene from the terraces of the inn. On one side precipitous mountains, whose bases slope into an inclined plane of olive and orange-copses — the latter forming, as it were, an emerald sky of leaves, starred with innumerable globes of their ripening fruit, whose rich splendour contrasted with the deep green foliage; on the other the sea — bounded on one side by the antique town of Gaeta, and the other by what appears to be an island, the promontory of Circe. From Gaeta to Terracina the whole scenery is of the most sublime character. At Terracina precipitous conical crags of immense height shoot into the sky and overhang the sea. At Albano we arrived again in sight of Rome. Arches after arches in unending lines stretching across the uninhabited wilderness, the blue defined line of the mountains seen between them; masses of nameless ruin standing like rocks out of the plain; and the plain itself, with its billowy and unequal surface, announced the neighbourhood of Rome. And what shall I say to you of Rome? If I speak of the inanimate ruins, the rude stones piled upon stones, which are the sepulchres of the fame of those who once arrayed them with the beauty which has faded, will you believe me insensible to the vital, the almost breathing creations of genius yet subsisting in their perfection? What has become, you will ask, of the Apollo, the Gladiator, the Venus of the Capitol? What of the Apollo di Belvedere, the Laocoon? What of Raffaele and Guido? These things are best spoken of when the mind has drunk in the spirit of their forms; and little indeed can I, who must devote no more than a few months to the contemplation of them, hope to know or feel of their profound beauty.

I think I told you of the Coliseum, and its impressions on me on my first visit to this city. The next most

considerable relic of antiquity, considered as a ruin, is the *Thermae* of Caracalla. These consist of six enormous chambers, above 200 feet in height, and each inclosing a vast space like that of a field. There are, in addition, a number of towers and labyrinthine recesses, hidden and woven over by the wild growth of weeds and ivy. Never was any desolation more sublime and lovely. The perpendicular wall of ruin is cloven into steep ravines filled up with flowering shrubs, whose thick twisted roots are knotted in the rifts of the stones. At every step the aerial pinnacles of shattered stone group into new combinations of effect, and tower above the lofty yet level walls, as the distant mountains change their aspect to one travelling rapidly along the plain. The perpendicular walls resemble nothing more than the cliff of Bisham wood, that is overgrown with wood, and yet is stony and precipitous — you know the one I mean; not the chalk-pit, but the spot that has the pretty copse of fir-trees and privet-bushes at its base, and where H** and I scrambled up, and you, to my infinite discontent, would go home. These walls surround green and level spaces of lawn, on which some elms have grown, and which are interspersed towards their skirts by masses of the fallen ruin, overtwined with the broad leaves of the creeping weeds. The blue sky canopies it, and is as the everlasting roof of these enormous halls.

But the most interesting effect remains. In one of the buttresses, that supports an immense and lofty arch, which « bridges the very winds of heaven », are the crumbling remains of an antique winding staircase, whose sides are open in many places to the precipice. This you ascend, and arrive on the summit of these piles. There grow on every side thick entangled wilderness of myrtle, and bay, and the flowering *laurustinus*,

whose white blossoms are just developed, the wild fig, and a thousand nameless plants sown by the wandering winds. These woods are intersected on every side by paths, like sheep tracks through the copse-wood of steep mountains, which wind to every part of the immense labyrinth. From the midst rise those pinnacles and masses, themselves like mountains, which have been seen from below. In one place you wind along a narrow strip of weed-grown ruin, on one side is the immensity of earth and sky, on the other a narrow chasm, which is bounded by an arch of enormous size, fringed by the many-coloured foliage and blossoms, and supporting a lofty and irregular pyramid, overgrown like itself with the all-prevailing vegetation. Around rise other crags and other peaks, all arrayed, and the deformity of their vast desolation softened down, by the undecaying investiture of nature. Come to Rome. It is a scene by which expression is overpowered; which words cannot convey. Still further, winding up one-half of the shattered pyramids, by the path through the blooming copsewood, you come to a little mossy lawn, surrounded by the wild shrubs; it is overgrown with anemones, wall-flowers, and violets, whose stalks pierce the starry moss, and with radiant blue flowers, whose names I know not, and which scatter through the air the divinest odour, which, as you recline under the shade of the ruin, produces sensations of voluptuous faintness, like the combinations of sweet music. The paths still wind on, threading the perplexed windings, other labyrinths, other lawns, and deep dells of wood, and lofty rocks, and terrific chasms. When I tell you that these ruins cover several acres, and that the paths above penetrate at least half their extent, your imagination will fill up all that I am unable to express of this astonishing scene.



THOMAS CARLYLE

1795-1881

Thomas Carlyle nacque in Scozia, a Ecclefechan, nella contea di Dumfries da povera famiglia di operai. A quindici anni andò a piedi a Edimburgo, percorrendo una distanza di oltre cento miglia, per studiare a quella Università, ove si dedicò specialmente alle matematiche. Finiti gli studi universitarii, insegnò come maestro alla scuola pubblica di Annan e poi a quella di Kircaldy. Durante questi anni d'insegnamento, si approfondì nella lingua e letteratura tedesca, che doveva poi dar colore a tutta la sua opera di critico e di filosofo e influire grandemente sul suo stile. Scrisse articoli per varie riviste e una elegante *Vita di Schiller* pubblicata nel 1825, quando Carlyle, abbandonato l'insegnamento, si era stabilito a Londra. L'anno dopo sposò Miss Jane Welsh, che aveva conosciuta e avuta scolara a Kircaldy, donna di grande ingegno, bella e assai ricca, che, divinando il genio di Carlyle, volentieri si unì a lui, sebbene per il suo carattere rude e difficile fosse un marito tutt'altro che desiderabile. Dopo due anni di dimora a Londra, essendosi Carlyle disgustato con Jeffrey direttore della Rivista di Edimburgo, al quale non piaceva troppo l'evoluzione dello stile dello scrittore, si ritirò a vivere a Craigenputtock, piccola terra di sua moglie, situata a mille metri sul mare in mezzo a un altipiano deserto. I Carlyle passarono in questa triste solitudine sei lunghi anni, dal 1828 al 1834, anni di indefesso lavoro, nei quali si formò il genio dello scrittore. Compose in questo tempo una delle opere sue più caratteristiche, *Sartor Resartus*, strana satira di ogni

1831-34

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aspetto della vita sociale, in cui l'autore assume posizione di aperto antagonismo contro lo spirito dell'età sua e attitudine di aspro censore che conservò poi sempre per tutta la vita. Il *Sartor Resartus* fu dapprima stampato nel *Fraser's Magazine*, ma non incontrò il favore del pubblico inglese, che sentiva nel libro l'influenza della filosofia tedesca. Stanchi della vita triste e angustiata di 'amara economia' di Craigenputtock, nel 1834 i Carlyle tornarono a Londra in una casa a Chelsea, dove passarono il resto della vita. Nel 1837 pubblicò il primo suo grande lavoro storico, *The French Revolution*, brillante narrazione episodica della rivoluzione del 1789, scritta a grandi quadri fiammeggianti di vita e di intenso realismo, in una lingua tutta sua, a scatti, nervosa, che già aveva usato con grande originalità nel *Sartor Resartus*.¹

Seguendo l'esempio di Coleridge e di Hazlitt, Carlyle si accinse a preparare delle letture, che poi fece a Londra, sulla letteratura tedesca e su soggetti storici. Queste ultime furono pubblicate nel 1841 col titolo di *Heroes and Hero Worship*, opera di grande vigore, in cui il pensatore espone il suo modo di considerare la storia, e spiega la sua così detta 'Great Man Theory': essere, cioè, la biografia il fondamento primo della storia, poichè tutti i grandi avvenimenti umani hanno origine da un grande uomo. Negli anni seguenti il Carlyle si occupò a scrivere le famose biografie: *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* che pubblicò nel 1845, e la *History of Frederick II* (1858-1865), che è per certi rispetti la sua opera maggiore. Dopo questa pubblicazione scrisse qualche altro lavoro, ma senza aggiunger nulla alla sua gloria. Morì nel febbraio del 1881, e fu sepolto nel cimitero campestre di Ecclefechan.

Sebbene l'opera di Carlyle sia grande e varia, egli è soprattutto uno storico e tiene indubbiamente il primo posto tra gli storici della scuola scientifica dell'era vittoriana.

¹ Pare che dalla lettura della *French Revolution* venisse al Carducci (che ebbe forse, inconsciamente, più di un punto di somiglianza col Carlyle) la prima ispirazione dei sonetti del *Ca ira*.

E fu senza dubbio una delle forze più potenti del suo secolo, e lottò gagliardamente per rialzare il livello del pensiero e delle opinioni umane, combattendo con ardore ed eloquenza di vero profeta le tendenze materialistiche dell'età sua, e la menzogna e l'ipocrisia allora più che mai dominatrici anche in Inghilterra, e specialmente nella vita pubblica. Quanto all'originalità dello stile, di cui tanto si è discusso, il Carlyle, dopo aver cominciato a scrivere in un inglese semplice e piano, creò una lingua tutta sua, ibrida, rude talvolta, ma sempre piena di forza e di colore, che i critici chiamarono 'Carlylese', la cui peculiarità non è tanto dovuta all'omissione dei pronomi, all'uso di maiuscole, alle esclamazioni e alla costruzione involuta alla tedesca, quanto al fervore lirico di entusiasmo o al torrente di indignazione di cui era posseduto lo scrittore.

THE FLIGHT OF VARENNES ¹*(From « The French Revolution », Book IV, Chap. VI)*

The Korff Berline, fairly ahead of all this riding Avalanche,² reached the little paltry Village of Varennes about eleven o'clock; hopeful, in spite of that hoarse-whispering Unknown.³ Do not all Towns now lie behind us; Verdun avoided, on our right? Within wind of Bouillé⁴ himself, in a manner; and the darkest of mid-summer nights favouring us! And so we halt on the hill-top at the South end of the Village; expecting our relay; which young Bouillé, Bouillé's own son, with his Escort of Hussars, was to have ready; for in this Village is no Post. Distracting to think of: neither horse nor Hussar is here! Ah, and stout horses, a proper relay belonging to Duke Choiseul, do stand at hay, but in the Upper Village over the Bridge; and we know not of them. Hussars likewise do wait, but drinking in the taverns. For indeed it is six hours beyond the time;

¹ Nel 1791 Luigi XVI, insieme alla famiglia tenta di fuggire dalla Francia e rifugiarsi in Prussia. La regina Maria Antonietta viaggia sotto il nome di Baronessa di Korff e il re travestito passa per suo valletto. Ma nel villaggio di Sainte-Menehould il re è riconosciuto dall'ufficiale di posta Drouet che saltato a cavallo raggiunge la berlina reale a Varennes e fa arrestare il re.

² La 'valanga cavalcante' è formata da Drouet e dai suoi amici che corrono a briglia sciolta per raggiungere la berlina reale mentre un gruppo di gentiluomini realisti sprona a tutt'uomo per prevenire Drouet e affrettare la fuga del re.

³ Quando la berlina reale passò rapida da Clermont un cavaliere sconosciuto bisbigliò alcune parole misteriose allo sportello e si dileguò nella notte.

⁴ Bouillé a capo di un corpo di ussari attendeva il re a Varennes.

young Bouillé, silly stripling, thinking the matter over for this night, has retired to bed. And so our yellow Couriers,¹ inexperienced, must rove, groping, bungling,² through a Village mostly asleep: Postillions will not, for any money, go on with the tired horses; not at least without refreshment; not they, let the Valet in round hat³ argue as he likes.

Miserable! 'For five-and-thirty minutes' by the king's watch, the Berline is at a dead stand: Round-Hat arguing with Churn-boots;⁴ tired horses slobbering⁵ their meal-and-water; yellow Couriers groping, bungling; — young Bouillé asleep, all the while, in the Upper Village, and Choiseul's fine team standing there at bay. No help for it; not with a king's ransom; the horses deliberately slobber, Round-hat argues, Bouillé sleeps. And mark now, in the thick night, do not two Horsemen, with jaded trot, come clank-clanking; and start with half-pause, if one noticed them, at sight of this dim mass of a Berline, and its dull slobbering and arguing; then prick off faster,⁶ into the Village! It is Drouet, he and Clerk Guillaume! Still ahead, they two, of the whole riding hurlyburly;⁷ unshot, though some brag of having chased them. Perilous is Drouet's errand also; but he is an Old-Dragoon, with his wits shaken thoroughly awake.

The village of Varennes lies dark and slumberous,⁸ a most unlevel Village, of inverse saddle-shape; as men

¹ La scorta reale aveva le livree gialle.

² Annaspargere, andare a casaccio.

³ Cioè il re che era travestito da valletto.

⁴ Villano, vaccaio.

⁵ *To slobber* = far schiuma; il rumore che fanno i cavalli quando mangiano.

⁶ Galoppando più veloci.

⁷ Massa.

⁸ Assonnato, addormentato.

write. It sleeps; the rushing of the River Aire singing lullaby to it. Nevertheless from the Golden Arm, *Bras d'Or* Tavern, across that sloping Marketplace, there still comes shine of social light; comes voice of rude drovers, or the like, who have not yet taken the stirrup-cup;¹ Boniface Le Blanc, in white apron, serving them: cheerful to behold. To this *Bras d'Or* Drouet enters, alacrity looking through his eyes; he nudges² Boniface, in all privacy. « *Camarade, es-tu bon Patriote*, Art thou a good Patriot? » — « *Si, je suis!* » answers Boniface. — « In that case » eagerly whispers Drouet — what whisper is needful, heard of Boniface alone.

And now see Boniface Le Blanc bustling,³ as he never did for the jolliest toper.⁴ See Drouet and Guillaume, dexterous Old-Dragoons, instantly down blocking the Bridge, with a 'furniture-wagon they find there', with whatever wagons, tumbrils,⁵ barrels, barrows,⁶ their hands can lay hold of; — till no carriage can pass. Then swiftly, the Bridge once blocked, see them take station hard by, under Varennes Archway: joined by Le Blanc, Le Blanc's brother, and one or two alert Patriots he has roused. Some half-dozen in all, with National muskets, they stand close, waiting under the Archway, till that same Korff Berline rumble up. It rumbles up: *Alte là!* lanterns flash out from under coat-skirts, bridles chuck in strong fists, two National muskets level themselves fore and aft through the two Coach-doors: « Mesdames, your Passports? — Alas, Alas! Sieur

¹ Bicchiere d'addio.

² Toccar col gomito.

³ Darsi da fare, affaticarsi.

⁴ Bevitore.

⁵ Ceste per il fieno.

⁶ Carretto.

Sausse, Procureur of the Township, Tallow chandler¹ also and Grocer, is there, with official grocer-politeness; Drouet with fierce logic and ready wit: — The respected Travelling Party, be it Baroness de Korff's, or persons of still higher consequence, will perhaps please to rest itself in M. Sausse's till the dawn strike up! O Louis; O hapless Marie-Antoinette, fated to pass thy life with such men! Phlegmatic Louis, art thou but lazy semi-animate phlegm, then, to the centre of thee? King, Captain-General, Sovereign Frank! if thy heart ever formed, since it began beating under the name of heart, any resolution at all, be it now then, or never in this world: — « Violent nocturnal individuals, and if it were persons of high consequence? And if it were the king himself? Has the king not the power, which all beggars have, of travelling unmolested on his own Highway? Yes: it is the king; and tremble ye to know it! The king has said, in this one small matter; and in France, or under God's Throne, is no power that shall gainsay. Not the king shall ye stop here under this your miserable Archway; but his dead body only, and answer it to Heaven and Earth. To me, Bodyguards; Postillions, *en avant!* — One fancies in that case the pale paralysis of these two Le Blanc musketeers; the drooping of Drouet's underjaw; and how Procureur Sausse had melted like tallow in furnace-heat: Louis faring on; in some few steps awakening young Bouillé, awakening relays and Hussars: triumphant entry, with cavalcading high-brandishing Escort, and Escorts, into Montmédi; and the whole course of French History different!

¹ Mercante di sego.

FREDERICK THE GREAT

(From « *The History of Frederick II.* »)

About fourscore¹ years ago, there used to be seen, sauntering on the terraces of Sans-Soucis, for a short time in the afternoon, or you might have met him elsewhere at an earlier hour, riding or driving in a rapid business manner, on the open roads or through the straggy² woods and avenues of that intricate amphibious Postdam region, a highly interesting lean little old man, of alert though slightly stooping figure; whose name among strangers was king *Friedrich the second* or Frederick the Great of Prussia, and at home among the common people, who much loved and esteemed him, was *Vater Fritz* — Father Fred — a name of familiarity which had not bred in that instance.

He is a king every inch of him³; though without the trappings⁴ of a king. Presents himself in a Spartan simplicity of vesture: no crown, but an old military cocked-hat⁵ generally old, or trampled and kneaded⁶ into absolute *softness* if new; no sceptre but one like Agamemnon's, a walking stick cut from the wood, which serves also as a riding-stick (with which he hits the horse 'between the ears' say authors); and for royal robes, a mere soldier's blue coat with red facings.

¹ *Score* = ventina; *fourscore* = ottantina.

² Sparsi.

³ *Inch* = pollice, misura di lunghezza. *He is a king every inch of him* = è un re in tutto e per tutto, un vero re.

⁴ *Finimenti*; cioè senza la vana pompa regale.

⁵ Tricorno.

⁶ Pigiato e maneggiato da renderlo soffice.

coat likely to be old, and sure to have a good deal of Spanish snuff on the breast of it; rest of the apparel dim, unobtrusive in colour¹ or cut, ending in high over-knee military boots, which may be brushed (and, I hope kept soft with an underhand suspicion of oil) but are not permitted to be blackened or varnished. The man is not of god-like physiognomy, any more than of imposing stature or costume; close-shut mouth with thin lips, prominent jaws and nose, receding brow, by no means of Olympian height; head, however is of long form, and has superlative gray eyes in it. Not what is called a beautiful man: nor yet, by all appearance what is called a happy. On the contrary, the face bears evidence of many sorrows, of much hard labour done in this world, and seems to anticipate nothing but more still coming. Great unconscious and some conscious pride, well tempered with a cheery mockery of humour, are written on that old face, which carries its chin well forward, in spite of the slight stoop about the neck; snuffy nose, rather flung into the air, under its old cocked-hat, like an old snuffy lion on the watch; and such a pair of eyes as no man, or lion, or lynx of that century bore elsewhere, according to all the testimony we have. Most excellent, potent, brilliant eyes, swift-darting as the stars, steadfast as the sun; gray, we said of the azure-gray colour; large enough, not of glaring size; the habitual expression of them vigilance and penetrating sense, rapidity resting on depth... The voice, if he speaks to you, is of similar physiognomy: clear, melodious and sonorous; all tones are in it, from that of ingenuous inquiry, glaceful sociality, light-flowing banter (rather prickly for most part) up to definite word

¹ Di colore non appariscente.

of command, up to desolating word of rebuke and reprobation... The French revolution may be said to have, for about half a century, quite submerged Friedrick, abolished him from the memories of men; and now on coming to light again, he is found to be defaced under strange mud-incrustations, and the eyes of mankind look at him from a singularly changed, what we must call oblique and perverse point of vision. This is one of the difficulties in dealing with his history — especially if you happen to believe both in the French Revolution and in him; that is to say, both that Real Kingship is eternally indispensable, and also that the destruction of Sham Kingship ¹ (a frightful process) is occasionally so.

SHAKSPEARE

(From '*Heroes and Hero-Worship*', Lecture in)

Of this Shakspeare of ours, perhaps the opinion one sometimes hears a little idolatrously expressed is, in fact, the right one; I think the best judgment not of this country only, but of Europe at large, is slowly pointing to the conclusion that Shakspeare is the chief of all poets hitherto; the greatest intellect who, in our recorded world ² has left record of himself in the way of ³ Literature. On the whole, I know not such a power of vision, such a faculty of thought, if we take all the characters of it, in any other man. Such a calmness

¹ Falsa, vana regalità.

² Nel nostro mondo storico.

³ Per mezzo della.

of depth; placid joyous strength; all things imaged in that great soul of his so true and clear, as in a tranquil unfathomable sea! It has been said, that in the constructing of Shakspeare's Dramas there is, apart from all other 'faculties' as they are called, an understanding manifested, equal to that in Bacon's *Novum Organum*. That is true; and it is not a truth that strikes every one. It would become more apparent if we tried, any of us for himself, how, out of Shakspeare's dramatic materials, *we* could fashion such a result! The built house seems all so fit,¹ — everyway as it should be, as if it came there by its own law and the nature of things — we forget the rude disorderly quarry it was shaped from. The very perfection of the house, as if Nature herself had made it, hides the builder's merit. Perfect, more perfect than any other man, we may call Shakspeare in this: he discerns, knows as by instinct, what condition he works under, what his materials are, what his own force and its relation to them is. It is not a transitory glance of insight² that will suffice; it is deliberate illumination of the whole matter; it is a calmly *seeing* eye; a great intellect, in short. How a man, of some wide thing that he has witnessed, will construct a narrative, what kind of picture and delineation he will give of it, — is the best measure you could get of what intellect is in the man. Which circumstance is vital and shall stand prominent; which unessential, fit to be suppressed; where is the true *beginning*, the true sequence³ and ending? To find out this, you task⁴

¹ Adatta.

² Intuizione.

³ Conseguenza.

⁴ Ponete a contributo.

the whole force of insight that is in the man. He must understand the thing; according to the depth of his understanding will the fitness of his answer be. You will try him so. Does like join itself to like;¹ does the spirit of method stir in that confusion, so that its embroilment becomes order? Can the man say, *Fiat lux*, let there be light; and out of chaos make a world? Precisely as there is light in himself, will he accomplish this.

Or indeed we may say again, it is in what I called Portrait-painting, delineating of men and things, especially of men, that Shakspeare is great. All the greatness of the man comes out decisively here. It is unexampled, I think, that calm creative perspicacity of Shakspeare. The thing he looks at reveals not this or that face of it, but its inmost heart, and generic secret: it dissolves itself as in light before him, so that he discerns the perfect structure of it. Creative, we said: poetic creation, what is this too but *seeing* the thing sufficiently? The *word* that will describe the thing, follows of itself from such clear intense sight of the thing. And is not Shakspeare's *morality*, his valour, candour, tolerance, truthfulness; his whole victorious strength and greatness, which can triumph over such obstructions, visible there too? Great as the world!... It is truly a lordly spectacle how this great soul takes in all kinds of men and objects, a Falstaff, an Othello, a Juliet, a Coriolanus; sets them all forth to us in their round completeness; loving, just, the equal brother of all. *Novum Organum*, and all the intellect you will find in Bacon, is of a quite secondary order; earthy, material, poor in comparison with this. Among modern men, one finds, in strictness almost

¹ Il simile si collegherà al simile?

nothing of the same rank. Goethe alone, since the days of Shakspeare, reminds me of it. Of him too you say that he *saw* the object; you may say what he himself says of Shakspeare: 'His characters are like watches with dial-plates¹ of transparent crystal; they show you the hour like others, and the inward mechanism also is all visible'.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE OF CROMWELL

(From '*The Life of Cromwell*')
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'His Highness' says Whitelocke² 'was in a rich but plain suit — black velvet, with cloak of the same; about his hat a broad band of gold'. Does the reader see him? A rather likely³ figure, I think. Stands some five feet ten or more; a man of strong, solid stature, and dignified. now partly military carriage: the expression of him valour and devout intelligence — energy and delicacy on a basis of simplicity. Fifty-four years old, gone April last; brown hair and moustache are getting gray. A figure of sufficient impressiveness — not lovely to the man-milliner⁴ species, nor pretending to be so. Massive stature; big, massive head, of somewhat leonine aspect; wart above the right eyebrow; nose of considerable blunt-aquiline proportions; strict yet copious lips, full of all tremulous sensibilities,⁵ and also, if need were,

¹ Quadranti.

² Fedele amico di Cromwell che scrisse delle 'Memorie', documento importante per la storia del Protettorato.

³ Avvenente, simpatica.

⁴ Effeminato.

⁵ Delicata sensibilità.

of all fiercenesses and rigours; deep, loving eyes — call them grave, call them stern — looking from under those craggy brows¹ as if in life-long sorrow, and yet not thinking it sorrow, thinking it only labour and endeavour. On the whole, a right noble lion-face and hero-face; and to me royal enough.

¹ Ispide ciglia.

LORD MACAULAY

1800-1859

Thomas Babington Macaulay, figlio di un ricco mercante londinese, zelante *tory* che combattè con Wilberforce per l'abolizione della schiavitù nelle colonie britanniche, nacque nel 1800 a Rothley Temple nella contea di Leicester. D'ingegno straordinariamente precoce, dotato di memoria meravigliosa, potè studiare privatamente fino ai diciotto anni, e formarsi agiatamente una larga coltura storica e letteraria. Nel 1818 entrò nel Trinity College di Cambridge, dove si laureò con onore in legge. Nel 1825 cominciò la sua carriera letteraria col famoso saggio su *Milton*, pubblicato nella *Edinburgh Review*, di cui divenne il più brillante scrittore. Nello stesso tempo cominciava la sua non meno fortunosa carriera di uomo politico: a trent'anni fu eletto deputato; ed essendosi segnalato come eloquente oratore fu, nel 1834, nominato membro del consiglio legale per l'India: la riforma del codice penale indiano porta l'impronta magistrale dell'opera sua. Nel 1838 tornò in Inghilterra col materiale per i suoi due famosi saggi proconsolari, quello su Lord Clive e quello su Hastings, che insieme con altri pubblicò nel 1843. L'anno prima aveva dato in luce una sua opera poetica, i *Lays of Ancient Rome*, canti che godettero allora di molta popolarità. Hanno un bel ritmo sonoro, lingua vigorosa qual si conviene all'argomento, ma mancano delle qualità della grande poesia e sono molto monotoni e non privi di retorica. I *Critical and Historical Essays*, ricchi, varii, meravigliosi per la stringente dialettica, il solido ragionamento e la smagliante eloquenza dello scrittore, sono tra i più

bei saggi di ogni letteratura e formano parte integrale del patrimonio letterario inglese: si rammentino quelli su *Lord Clive*, su *Warren Hastings*, su *Pitt*, su *Addison*, sui *Restoration Dramatists*, per non citare che i più famosi. In Italia fu assai noto il saggio su Nicolò Machiavelli, letto con grande ammirazione finchè Pasquale Villari non ebbe pubblicata la sua grande opera, omai classica, tradotta anche in inglese.

Il Macaulay era stato popolare scrittore di saggi ed eloquente oratore per venticinque anni, quando nel 1849 si rivelò grande storico con la pubblicazione della *History of England from the Accession of James II*. Già nel 1828, aveva esposto, in un articolo pubblicato nella *Edinburgh Review*, una sua teoria della storia: che questa, cioè, doveva esser narrata in modo vivo e pittorico e somigliare, per così dire, ai romanzi di W. Scott. Doveva, dunque, richiamare in vita i nostri antenati con tutte le loro peculiarità di linguaggio, di costumi, di abiti: visitare le lor case, sedersi alle loro mense, frugare nei loro vecchi guardaroba, spiegare l'uso della loro massiccia mobiglia. « Io non sarò contento, scrive egli in una lettera, finchè non riescirò a produrre qualche cosa che prenda il posto, sia pure per pochi giorni, del romanzo alla moda sul tavolino delle signorine ». E infatti i suoi volumi ebbero un successo immediato e straordinario. Con la sua immensa e profonda coltura storica, la sua conoscenza dei più minuti e caratteristici particolari e il suo stile limpido, vigoroso e colorito riuscì a rappresentare una serie di brillantissime pitture quali il lettore inglese non aveva mai viste prima d'allora, e che nessuno storico ha mai superato dipoi. Tra i passi più belli di questi cinque volumi, che narrano la storia di soli quindici anni, è la descrizione delle condizioni dell'Inghilterra alla morte di Carlo II, meravigliosa raccolta di piccoli fatti tratti da mille fonti differenti e disposti con mano maestra nonchè la storia della cospirazione di Monmouth e l'assedio di Londonderry.

Quanto a' suoi giudizi come storico, gli si rimprovera giustamente la mancanza di serenità, la crudezza di taluni giudizi su uomini e cose, e la sua aperta ostilità agli Stuarts.

Lo stile del Macaulay è spontaneo, naturale, di una chiarezza mirabile, sebbene alla lunga la perfetta regolarità e compostezza del periodo generi una certa monotonia. Nel 1857 fu creato pari d'Inghilterra. Morì nel 1859, ed ebbe sepoltura nell'Abbazia di Westminster. La sua vita fu scritta dal nepote Sir George Trevelyan, ed è una delle più belle biografie che la letteratura inglese possieda.¹

¹ E lo stesso Sir George Macaulay Trevelyan che ha pubblicato *Garibaldi e la difesa di Roma* (1908) e *Garibaldi e i Mille*; opere tradotte in italiano dalla signora Emma Bice Dobelli: Bologna, Zanichelli.

*cit. in i. Cortesi - Il Biografo in Gran Bretagna e pubblic. co
anche: Selections from the Works of Lord Macaulay
edited with occasional Notes - London - Longmans, Green & Co.
1896*

di Vincenzo Lattuada

KING CHARLES THE SECOND

(From '*The History of England*' chap. iv)

The death of king Charles the Second took the nation by surprise. His frame was naturally strong, and did not appear to have suffered from excess. He had always been mindful of his health even in his pleasures; and his habits were such as promise a long life and a robust old age. Indolent as he was on all occasions which required tension of the mind, he was active and persevering in bodily exercise. He had, when young, been renowned as a tennis player, and was, even in the decline of life, an indefatigable walker. His ordinary pace was such that those who were admitted to the honour of his society found it difficult to keep up with him. He rose early, and generally passed three or four hours a day in the open air. He might be seen, before the dew was off the grass in St. James's Park, striding among the trees, playing with his spaniels, and flinging corn to his ducks; and these exhibitions endeared him to the common people, who always love to see the great unbend.

At length, towards the close of the year 1684, he was prevented, by a slight attack of what was supposed to be gout, from rambling as usual. He now spent his mornings in his laboratory, where he amused himself with experiments on the properties of mercury. His temper seemed to have suffered from confinement. He had no apparent cause for disquiet. His kingdom was tranquil: he was not in pressing want of money: his power was greater than it had ever been: the party which had long thwarted him had been beaten down;

but the cheerfulness which had supported him against adverse fortune had vanished in this season of prosperity. A trifle now sufficed to depress those elastic spirits which had borne up against defeat, exile, and penury. His irritation frequently showed itself by looks and words such as could hardly have been expected from a man so eminently distinguished by good humour and good breeding. It was not supposed however that his constitution was seriously impaired. His palace had seldom presented a gayer or a more scandalous appearance than on the evening of Sunday the first of February 1685. Some grave persons who had gone thither, after the fashion of that age, to pay their duty to their sovereign, and who had expected that, on such a day, his court would wear a decent aspect, were struck with astonishment and horror. The great gallery of Whitehall, an admirable relic of the magnificence of the Tudors, was crowded with revellers and gamblers. The King sate there chatting and toying with three women, whose charms were the boast, and whose vices were the disgrace, of three nations. Barbara Palmer, Duchess of Cleveland, was there, no longer young, but still retaining some traces of that superb and voluptuous loveliness which twenty years before overcame the hearts of all men. There too was the Duchess of Portsmouth, whose soft and infantine features were lighted up with the vivacity of France. Hortensia Mancini, Duchess of Mazarini, and niece of the great cardinal, completed the group. She had been early removed from her native Italy to the court where her uncle was supreme. His power and her own attractions had drawn a crowd of illustrious suitors round her. Charles himself, during his exile, had sought her hand in vain. No gift of nature or of fortune seemed to be wanting to her. Her face was

beautiful with the rich beauty of the South, her understanding quick, her manners graceful, her rank exalted, her possessions immense; but her ungovernable passions had turned all these blessings into curses. She had found the misery of an ill assorted marriage intolerable, had fled from her husband, had abandoned her vast wealth, and, after having astonished Rome and Piedmont by her adventures, had fixed her abode in England. Her house was the favourite resort of men of wit and pleasure, who, for the sake of her smiles and her table, endured her frequent fits of insolence and ill humour...

A party of twenty courtiers was seated at cards round a large table on which gold was heaped in mountains. Even then the king had complained that he did not feel quite well. He had no appetite for his supper: his rest that night was broken; but on the following morning he rose, as usual, early.

Scarcely had Charles risen from his bed when his attendants perceived that his utterance was indistinct, and that his thoughts seemed to be wandering. Several men of rank had, as usual, assembled to see their sovereign shaved and dressed. He made an effort to converse with them in his usual gay style; but his ghastly look surprised and alarmed them. Soon his face grew black; his eyes turned in his head; he uttered a cry, staggered, and fell into the arms of Thomas Lord Bruce, son of the Earl of Ailesburg. A physician who had charge of the royal retorts and crucibles happened to be present. He had no lancet; but he opened a vein with a penknife. The blood flowed freely; but the king was still insensible.

He was laid on his bed, where, during a short time, the Duchess of Portsmouth hung over him with the familiarity of a wife. But the alarm had been given.

The Queen and the duchess of York were hastening to the room. The favourite was forced to retire to her own apartments. Those apartments had been thrice pulled down and thrice rebuilt by her lover to gratify her caprice. The very furniture of the chimney was massy silver. Several fine paintings, which properly belonged to the Queen, had been transferred to the dwelling of the mistress. The sideboards were piled with richly wrought plate. In the niches stood cabinets, the masterpieces of Japanese art. On the hangings, fresh from the looms of Paris, were depicted, in tints which no English tapestry could rival, birds of gorgeous plumage, landscapes, hunting matches, the lordly terrace of Saint Germain, the statues and fountains of Versailles. In the midst of this splendour, purchased by guilt and shame, the unhappy woman gave herself up to an agony of grief, which, to do her justice, was not wholly selfish.

And now the gates of Whitehall, which ordinarily stood open to all comers, were closed. But persons whose faces were known were still permitted to enter. The antechambers and galleries were soon filled to overflowing; and even the sick room was crowded with peers, privy councillors, and foreign ministers... During the night Charles earnestly recommended the Duchess of Portsmouth and her boy to the care of James; — And do not — he good-naturedly added, — let poor Nellie starve. — The Queen sent excuses for her absence by Halifax. She said that she was too much disordered to resume her post by the couch, and implored pardon for any offence which she might unwittingly have given. — She ask my pardon, poor woman! — cried Charles; — I ask hers with all my heart. —

The morning light began to peep through the windows of Whitehall, and Charles desired the attendants

to pull aside the curtains, that he might have one more look at the day. He remarked that it was time to wind up a clock which stood near his bed. These little circumstances were long remembered, because they proved beyond dispute that, when he declared himself a Roman catholic, he was in full possession of his faculties. He apologized to those who had stood round him all night for the trouble which he had caused, He had been, he said, a most unconscionable time dying; but he hoped that they would excuse it. This was the last glimpse of that exquisite urbanity, so often found potent to charm away the resentment of a justly incensed nation. Soon after dawn the speech of the dying man failed. Before ten his senses were gone. Great numbers had repaired to the churches at the hour of morning service. When the prayer for the King was read, loud groans and sobs showed how deeply his people felt for him. At noon on Friday, the sixth of February, he passed away without a struggle.

THE ENGLISH COUNTRY GENTLEMAN OF 1685

(From '*The History of England*' chap. III)

A country gentleman who witnessed the Revolution was probably in the receipt ¹ of about the fourth part of the rent which his acres now yield to his posterity: he was, therefore, as compared with his posterity, a poor man, and was generally under the necessity of residing, with little interruption, on his estate. To travel on the continent, to maintain an establishment in London, or even to visit London frequently, were pleasures in

¹ Riceveva.

which only the great proprietors could indulge. It may be confidently affirmed that of the squires whose names were in King Charles's commissions of peace and lieutenancy, not one in twenty went to town once in five years, or had ever in his life wandered so far as Paris. Many lords of manors had received an education differing little from that of their menial servants. The heir of an estate often passed his boyhood and youth at the seat of his family with no better tutors than grooms and gamekeepers, and scarce attained learning enough to sign his name to a *Mittimus*.¹ If he went to school and to college he generally returned before he was twenty to the seclusion of the old hall; and there, unless his mind were very happily constituted by nature, soon forgot his academical pursuits in rural business and pleasures. His chief serious employment was the care of his property. He examined samples of grain, handled pigs, and on market-days, made bargains over a tankard with drovers and hop-merchants.² His chief pleasures were commonly derived from field-sports and from an unrefined sensuality. His language and pronunciation were such as we should now expect to hear only from the most ignorant clowns. His oaths, coarse jests, and scurrilous terms of abuse, were uttered with the broadest³ accent of his province. It was easy to discern, from the first words which he spoke, whether he came from Somersetshire or Yorkshire. He troubled himself little about decorating his abode, and if he attempted decoration, seldom produced anything but deformity. The litter of a farmyard gathered under the windows

¹ *Mandato d'arresto*.

² *Mercanti di luppoli*.

³ *Più spiccato*.

of his bed chamber, and the cabbages and gooseberry bushes grew close to his hall-door. His table was loaded with coarse plenty, and guests were cordially welcome to it; but as the habit of drinking to excess was general in the class to which he belonged, and as his fortune did not enable him to intoxicate large assemblies daily with claret or canary, strong beer was the ordinary beverage. The quantity of beer consumed in those days was indeed enormous; for beer then was to the middle and lower classes not only all that beer now is, but all that wine, tea, and ardent spirits now are; it was only at great houses, or on great occasions, that foreign drink was placed on the board. The ladies of the house, whose business it had commonly been to cook the repast retired as soon as the dishes had been devoured, and left the gentlemen to their ale and tobacco. The coarse jollity of the afternoon was often prolonged till the revellers were laid under the table. From this description it might be supposed that the English esquire of the seventeenth century did not materially differ from a rustic miller or ale-house keeper of our time. There are, however, some important parts of his character still to be noted, which will greatly modify this estimate. Unlettered as he was and unpolished, he was still in some important points a gentleman. He was a member of a proud and powerful aristocracy, and was distinguished by many both of the good and of the bad qualities which belong to aristocrats. His family pride was beyond that of a Talbot or a Howard.¹ He knew the genealogy and coats-of-arms of all his neighbours, and could tell which of them had assumed supporters²

¹ Antiche e illustri famiglie dell'aristocrazia inglese.

² *Supporter*, figura di uno stemma gentilizio.

without any right, and which of them were so unfortunate as to be great-grandsons of aldermen... Thus the character of the English esquire of the seventeenth century was compounded of two elements which we are not accustomed to find united. His ignorance and uncouthness, his low tastes and gross phrases, would, in our time, be considered as indicating a nature and a breeding thoroughly plebeian. Yet he was essentially a patrician, and had, in large measure, both the virtues and the vices which flourish among men set from their birth in high places, and accustomed to authority, to observance, and to self-respect. It is not easy for a generation which is accustomed to find chivalrous sentiments only in company with liberal studies and polished manners to image to itself a man with the deportment, the vocabulary, and the accent of a carter, yet punctilious, on matters of genealogy and precedence, and yet ready to risk his life rather than see a stain cast on the honour of his house. It is only, however, by thus joining together things seldom or never found together in our own experience, that we can form a just idea of that rustic aristocracy which constituted the main strength of the armies of Charles I, and which long supported with strange fidelity the interests of his descendants.

When the lord of a Lincolnshire or Shropshire manor appeared in Fleet Street, he was as easily distinguished from the resident population as a Turk or a Lascar.¹ His dress, his gait, his accent, the manner in which he stared at the shops, stumbled into the gutters, ran against the porters, and stood under the water-spouts,

¹ Cinesi che servono a bordo di navi europee.

marked him out as an excellent subject for the operations of swindlers and banterers. Bullies jostled him into the kennel. Hackney-coachmen splashed him from head to foot. Thieves explored, with perfect security, the huge pockets of his horseman's coat, while he stood entranced by the splendour of the Lord-Mayor's show.¹ Money-droppers,² sore from the cart's tail, introduced themselves to him, and appeared to him the most friendly gentlemen that he had ever seen. Painted women, the refuse of Lewkner Lane and Whetstone Park,³ passed themselves on him for countesses and maids of honour. If he asked his way to St. James's, his informants sent him to Mile End. If he went into a shop, he was instantly discerned to be a purchaser of everything that nobody else would buy, of second-hand embroidery, copper rings, and watches that would not go. If he rambled into any fashionable coffee-house, he became a mark for the insolent derision of fops and the grave waggery of Templars.⁴ Enraged and mortified, he soon returned to his mansion; and there, in the homage of his tenants, and the conversation of his boon companions, found consolation for the vexations and humiliations he had undergone. There he once more found himself a great man; and he saw nothing above him, except when at the assizes he took his seat on the bench near the Judge or when at the muster of the militia he saluted the Lord-Lieutenant.

¹ Processione che accompagna il *Mayor* nuovamente eletto da Westminster al Guildhall il 9 di Novembre.

² *Money-droppers* = furfanti che facendo mostra che uno avesse lasciato cadere una moneta gliela restituivano e, dopo aver in questo modo acquistata la sua fiducia, lo truffavano.

³ Quartieri equivoci di Londra.

⁴ Studenti di legge. *The Temple* è dove sono le corti di giustizia.

LORD BYRON

(From '*Literary Essays*')
f. 178 ed. Woodford.

The pretty fable by which the Duchess of Orleans illustrates the character of her son the Regent might, with little change, be applied to Byron. All the fairies, save one, had been bidden to his cradle. All the gossips had been profuse of their gifts. One had bestowed nobility, another genius, a third beauty. The malignant elf¹ who had been uninvited came last, and, unable to reverse what her sisters had done for their favourite, had mixed up a curse with every blessing. In the rank of Lord Byron, in his understanding, in his character, in his very person, there was a strange union of opposite extremes. He was born to all that men covet and admire. But in every one of those eminent advantages which he possessed over others was mingled something of misery and debasement. He was sprung from a house, ancient, indeed, and noble, but degraded and impoverished by a series of crimes and follies which had attained a scandalous publicity. The kinsman whom he succeeded had died poor, and, but for merciful judges would have died upon the gallows. The young peer had great intellectual powers; yet there was an unsound part in his mind. He had naturally a generous and feeling heart; but his temper was wayward and irritable. He had a head which statuary loved to copy, and a foot the deformity of which the beggars in the streets mimicked. Distinguished at once by the strength and by the weakness of his intellect, affectionate yet perverse, a poor

¹ Folletto.

lord, and a handsome cripple, he required, if ever man required, the firmest and the most judicious training.

But capriciously as nature had dealt with him, the parent to whom the office of forming his character was intrusted was more capricious still. She passed from paroxysms of rage to paroxysms of tenderness. At one time she stifled him with her caresses; at another time she insulted his deformity. He came into the world; and the world treated him as his mother had treated him, sometimes with fondness, sometimes with cruelty, never with justice. It indulged him without discrimination. He was truly a spoiled child, not merely the spoiled child of his parent, but the spoiled child of nature, the spoiled child of fortune, the spoiled child of fame, the spoiled child of society. His first poems were received with a contempt which, feeble as they were, they did not absolutely deserve. The poem which he published on his return from his travels was, on the other hand, extolled far above its merit. At twenty-four he found himself on the highest pinnacle of literary fame, with Scott, Wordsworth, Southey, and a crowd of other distinguished writers beneath his feet. There is scarcely an instance in history of so sudden a rise to so dizzy an eminence.

Everything that could stimulate, and everything that could gratify the strongest propensities of our nature — the gaze of a hundred drawing-rooms, the acclamations of the whole nation, the applause of applauded men, the love of the loveliest women — all this world and all the glory of it were at once offered to a young man to whom nature had given violent passions, and whom education had never taught to control them. He lived as many men live who have no similar excuse to plead for their faults. But his countrymen and his

countrywomen would love him and admire him. They were resolved to see in his excesses only the flash and outbreak of that same fiery mind which glowed in his poetry. He attacked religion; yet in religious circles his name was mentioned with fondness; and in many religious publications his works were censured with singular tenderness. He lampooned the Prince Regent, yet he could not alienate the Tories. Everything, it seemed, was to be forgiven to youth, rank, and genius.

Then came the reaction. Society, capricious in its indignation as it had been capricious in its fondness, flew into a rage with its forward and petted darling. He had been worshipped with an irrational idolatry. He was persecuted with an irrational fury. Much has been written about those unhappy domestic occurrences which decided the fate of his life. Yet nothing is, nothing ever was, positively known to the public but this, that he quarrelled with his lady, and that she refused to live with him. There have been hints in abundance, and shrugs and shakings of the head, and 'Well, well, we know', but we are not aware that there is before the world, substantiated by credible, or even by tangible evidence, a single fact indicating that Lord Byron was more in blame than any other man who is on bad terms with his wife. The professional men whom Lady Byron consulted were undoubtedly of opinion that she ought not to live with her husband. But it is to be remembered that they formed that opinion without hearing both sides. We do not say, we do not mean to insinuate, that Lady Byron was in any respect to blame. We think that those who condemn her on the evidence which is now before the public are as rash as those who condemn her husband. We will not pronounce any judgement, we cannot, even in our own minds, form any judgement on a transaction

which is so imperfectly known to us. It would have been well if, at the time of the separation all those who knew as little about the matter then as we know about it now had shown that forbearance which, under such circumstances, is but common justice.

We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality. In general, elopements, divorces, and family quarrels, pass with little notice. We read the scandal, talk about it for a day, and forget it. But once in six or seven years our virtue becomes outrageous. We cannot suffer the laws of religion and decency to be violated. We must make a stand against vice. We must teach libertines that the English people appreciate the importance of domestic ties. Accordingly, some unfortunate man, in no respect more depraved than hundreds whose offences have been treated with lenity, is singled out as an expiatory sacrifice. If he has children, they are to be taken from him. If he has a profession he has to be driven from it. He is cut by the higher orders, and hissed by the lower. He is, in truth, a sort of whipping boy, by whose vicarious agonies all the other transgressors of the same class are, it is supposed, sufficiently chastised. We reflect very complacently on our own severity, and compare with great pride the high standard of morals established in England with the Parisian laxity. At length our anger is satiated. Our victim is ruined and heart broken. And our virtue goes quietly to sleep for seven years more.

ROBERTO BROWNING

1812-1889

Roberto Browning nacque a Camberwell nel 1812. Sebbene appartenesse a famiglia agiata, ricevette una istruzione assai incompiuta, poichè ebbe a solo maestro suo padre, uomo d'affari tutto occupato nella Banca d'Inghilterra, e non frequentò mai alcuna Università. In gioventù fu attratto dalla poesia di Byron e di Shelley, e ispirandosi a questi poeti scrisse alcuni versi che non volle però pubblicare mai.

Il suo primo lavoro fu *Pauline* stampato nel 1833, opera assai caratteristica, ma di non molto valore, seguita nel 1835 da *Paracelsus*, scritto in rapidi versi sciolti, esuberante di pensiero, ove la forma drammatica è più definita, e dove si vede già chiara l'inclinazione del poeta alla osservazione psicologica. Seguì poi *Strafford*, soggetto suggeritogli dall'amico Macready, il grande interprete di Shakspeare, dramma che fu rappresentato sulla scena, ma con poco successo. Tre anni dopo apparve *Sordello*, storia di un'anima, forse la più strana delle opere di Browning e quella che mostra più evidenti i difetti della sua poesia. Nel 1838 fece un viaggio in Italia, e il soggiorno nella terra classica della poesia e dell'arte ebbe grande influenza sul suo genio. Compose in questo tempo la raccolta di poemi, di profumo tutto italiano, che chiamò *Bells and Pomegranates* (1841-46), la quale contiene la bella poesia di *Pippa Passes* e altre brevi liriche che lo rivelarono alto poeta. Nel 1846 sposò la poetessa Miss Elisabeth Barret e dopo varie vicende i due sposi si stabilirono a Firenze, dove Browning rimase fino alla morte della moglie avvenuta nel 1861. Durante il soggiorno fiorentino pubblicò

i poemi filosofici-religiosi di *Christmas-Eve* e *Easter-day* (1850), e i due volumi di *Men and Women*, che insieme con *Bells and Pomegranates* e *Dramatis Personae*, pubblicate nel 1864, dopo il suo ritorno a Londra, racchiudono il fiore della sua opera. Scrisse ancora *The Ring and the Book* (1868), lungo poema epico-drammatico, di soggetto italiano, in cui fa rivivere vibranti di vita e di passione i personaggi di un tristo dramma svoltosi due secoli prima.

Dopo il 1868, durante gli ultimi venti anni della sua vita, l'attività letteraria del Browning fu grande, avendo scritto e pubblicato diciotto volumi di poesia, che per altro poco aggiunsero alla sua gloria. Morì a Venezia nel dicembre del 1889, e fu sepolto nell'abbazia di Westminster. L'opera di Roberto Browning, voluminosa complessa e varia, è stata assai diversamente giudicata. Per molto tempo fu letto e ammirato solo da pochi devoti, e ignorato e sprezzato dal gran pubblico e dalla critica accademica. Poi negli ultimi anni della sua vita avvenne una grande reazione in suo favore: sorse come un culto per Browning, e lo studio delle sue opere divenne di moda, estendendosi al gran pubblico, tanto che nel 1881 fu fondata una 'Browning Society', che diede in luce varii libri per iniziare i novizi allo studio del poeta come se questi fosse già un classico.

Tra queste due opposte esagerazioni si giudica oggi più serenamente e giustamente. Il Browning è indubbiamente un grande poeta, un profondo psicologo, ma è anche assai imperfetto. Egli volle essere originale nel soggetto e nella lingua, e scelse argomenti strani e astrusi, e li trattò in una lingua poetica che sfida non solo ogni tradizione, ma talora anche le norme più elementari della frase inglese: usò rime barbare, frasi di concisione quasi telegrafica ch'egli riteneva la poesia dovesse suggerire spunti di pensiero, anzichè svolgere il pensiero distesamente, e riuscì oscuro. Talora l'oscurità deriva anche dal fatto ch'egli non riesce a fissare, a orientare, a — per così dire — cristallizzare il suo pensiero, anche perchè il pensiero suo corre troppo e sorpassa la parola. Nonostante questi difetti, egli è sempre uno dei

maggiori poeti dell'era vittoriana: ogni sua opera ha l'impronta della sua forte individualità, e i suoi studi di anime hanno una profondità e una potenza di penetrazione, una finezza di analisi di rado superate. Quando il poeta vuole, è altissimo lirico e artista squisito nella modellatura del verso: si leggano *The Lost Leader*, *Women and Roses*, *Last Ride Together*, la galoppante ballata *How we brought the good News* e le serene armonie di *Love among the Ruins* ed altre molte, piene di pensiero, di vita e di passione, che fanno rimpiangere che il poeta non abbia voluto scrivere di più in questa mirabile vena.

MEETING AT NIGHT ¹

The grey sea and the long black land;
 And the yellow half-moon large and low;
 And the startled little waves that leap
 In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
 As I gain the cove ² with pushing ³ prow,
 And quench its speed in the slushy sand. ⁴

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
 Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
 A tap at a pane, the quick sharp scratch ⁵
 And blue spurt ⁶ of a lighted match,
 And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears, ⁷
 Than the two hearts beating each to each!

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

Where the quiet-colour'd end of evening ⁸ smiles
 Miles and miles
 On the solitary pastures where our sheep
 Half asleep
 Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
 As they crop —

¹ Del Browning fu detto che non volesse mai mettere su carta idea che fosse potuta venire in mente anche ad altri. Questo *Incontro di notte* può essere saggio della sua sdegnosa originalità e del suo realismo.

² Spiaggia.

³ Irrompente.

⁴ E smorzo il suo impeto nella melmosa sabbia.

⁵ Stropiccio.

⁶ Guizzo.

⁷ Per la gioia e il timore.

⁸ Là dove il tramonto dai miti colori.

Was the site once of a city great and gay,
 (So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
 Ages since
Held his court in, gather'd councils, wielding far
 Peace or war.

Now — the country does not even boast a tree,
 As you see
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain hills
 From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
 Into one)

Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
 Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
 Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be prest,
 Twelve abreast.

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
 Never was!
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
 And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guess'd alone,
 Stock or stone —

Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
 Long ago;
Lust of glory prick'd their hearts up, dread of shame
 Struck them tame;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
 Bought and sold.

Now, — the single little turret that remains
 On the plains,
 By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
 Overscored,
 While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
 Through the chinks —

Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
Sprang sublime
And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced
As they raced,
And the monarch and his minions and his dames
View'd the games.

And I know, while thus the quiet-colour'd eve
 Smiles to leave
 To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
 In such peace,
 And the slopes and rills in undistinguish'd gray
 Melt away —

That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
 Waits me there
 In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
 For the goal,
 When the king look'd, where she looks now, breathless,
 [dumb
 Till I come.

But he look'd upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topp'd with temples, all the glades
Colonnades,
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts, — and then,
All the men!

When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
 Either hand
 On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
 Of my face,
 Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
 Each on each.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
 South and North,
 And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
 As the sky,
 Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force —
 Gold, of course.

O, heart! oh, blood that freezes, blood that burns,
 Earth's returns
 For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
 Shut them in,
 With their triumphs and their glories and the rest.
 Love is best!

THE PIED ¹ PIPER OF HAMELIN

(A Child's Story)

*ed. con note di A. Sordani
 per la Scuola di R. B. B.*

I

Hamelin town's in Brunswick,
 By famous Hanover city;
 The river Weser, deep and wide,
 Washes its wall on the southern side;
 A pleasanter spot you never spied;

¹ Variopinto; vestito a varii colori.

But, when begins my ditty,¹
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townfolk suffer so
From vermin² was a pity.

II

Rats!
They fought the dogs, and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cook's own ladles,
Split open the kegs³ of salted sprats,⁴
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.⁵

III

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
“ ’Tis clear ” cried they, “ our Mayor’s a noddy; ”⁶
And as for our Corporation — shocking
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine

¹ Canto.

² *Vermin* si usa per indicare un insieme di piccoli animali o insetti noiosi come mosche, topi, ecc., in questo caso sta per topi.

³ Bariletti.

⁴ Laterini (piccoli pesci).

⁵ Diesis e bimolle.

⁶ Uno sciocco.

For dolts¹ that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you are old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe² ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"³
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV

An hour they sat in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder⁴ I'd my ermine gown sell;
I wish I were a mile hence!
It's easy to bid one rack one's brain --
I'm sure my poor head aches again,
I've scratched it so, and all in vain;
O for a trap, a trap, a trap!"
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber-door but a gentle tap!
"Bless us" cried the Mayor, "What's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little, though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister,
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch⁵ grew mutinous

¹ Balordi.

² Manto civico.

³ Vi faremo far i fagotti.

⁴ Moneta danese.

⁵ Pancia.

For a plate of turtle green¹ and glutinous).²
"Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
Anything like the sound of rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat."

V

"Come in!" — the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure,
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red;
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in —
There was no guessing his kith and kin³
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one: "It's as⁴ my great grandsire,
Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!"

VI

He advanced to the Council-table:
And, "Please your honours", said he "I'm able,
By means of a secret charm, to draw

¹ *Green turtle* è una testuggine marina che ha una conchiglia color oliva. È molto apprezzata per la delicatezza della sua carne.

² *Glutinous*, molle, tenero, e si riferisce a testuggine.

³ Di che razza fosse e da quale paese venisse.

⁴ *As if*.

All creatures living beneath the sun,
That creep, or swim, of fly, or run,
After me so as you never saw!
And I chiefly use my charm
On creatures that do people harm,
The mole, and toad, and newt¹ and viper;
And people call me the Pied Piper".
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying,
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled).²
"Yet", said he, "poor piper as I am,
In Tartary I freed the Cham,³
Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;
I eased in Asia the Nizam⁴
Of a monstrous brood of vampire-bats:
And, as for what your brain bewilders,
If I can rid your town of rats,
Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
"One? fifty thousand!" — was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

¹ Ramarro.

² *Old-fashioned.*

³ Khan.

⁴ Principe indiano.

VII

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,¹
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eye twinkled.
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the house the rats came tumbling.
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny ² rats,
Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny ³ rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins.
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives —
Followed the Piper for their lives.⁴
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step by step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser,
Wherein all plunged and perished
— Save one, who, stout as Julius Ceasar,

¹ Maestro, uno che sa tutti i secreti della sua arte.

² Grossi.

³ Fulvo.

⁴ Con tanta fretta come se dovessero salvar la loro vita.

Swam across, and lived to carry
 (As he ¹ the manuscript he cherished)
 To Rat-land home his commentary,
 Which was: "At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
 I heard a sound as of scraping tripe, ²
 And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
 Into a cider-press's gripe;
 And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards, ³
 And a leaving ajar of conserve cupboards,
 And a drawing the corks of train-oil ⁴ flasks,
 And a breaking the hoops of butter casks;
 And it seemed as if a voice
 (Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery ⁵
 Is breathed) called out: O rats, rejoice!
 The world is grown to one vast drysaltery! ⁶
 To munch on, crunch on, take your nunccheon ⁷
 Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!
 And just as a bulky sugar puncheon, ⁸
 All ready stoved, ⁹ like a great sun shone
 Glorious scarce an inch before me,
 Just as methought it said, 'Come bore me!'
 — I found the Weser rolling o'er me.

¹ Giulio Cesare.

² Come un grattar di pancia.

³ Un muoversi di tavole che formano i recipienti ove stanno le cornie sotto aceto.

⁴ *Train-oil*, olio di balena.

⁵ *Psaltery*, strumento a corde usato dagli ebrei.

⁶ Salsamenteria.

⁷ *Luncheon*.

⁸ Barile.

⁹ Spalancato, con le stecche aperte.

VIII

You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
“Go”, cried the Mayor, “and get long poles!
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
Consult with carpenters and builders,
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!” — when suddenly up the face
Of the Piper perked in the Market-place,
With a “First, if you please, my thousand guilders!”.

ELISABETTA BARRET BROWNING

1806-1861

Elisabetta Barret, l'inspirata poetessa delle sofferenze e aspirazioni umane, nacque a Carlton Hall, presso Durham nel marzo del 1806. Di famiglia ricca, trascorse parte della giovinezza a Iiope End nella contea di Hereford, luogo a lei caro e che rammenta sovente nelle sue poesie giovanili. Di salute già delicata, fu colpita a quindici anni da una malattia di petto, e cercò sollievo nel clima mite di Torquay, dove si recò accompagnata dal fratello maggiore. A Torquay ebbe lo spavento e il dolore di vedere dalle finestre della sua camera perire tra le onde irate il fratello amato, e ne ricevette tale impressione da morirne quasi. Tornata a Londra, condusse per vari anni una vita di isolamento, chiusa in una stanza semioscura, visitata solo da pochi amici devoti, leggendo continuamente e dedicandosi alla poesia. Racconta ella stessa in una lettera,¹ che cominciò a scrivere versi a otto anni, ma non pubblicò nulla prima dell'*Essay on Mind* (1826) scritto nello stile di Pope, seguito nel 1833 da una versione del *Prometeo* di Eschilo. Nel 1844 apparvero i due volumi di *Poems*, che contengono *The Vision of Poets*, *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, *The Duchess of May*. I volumi furono bene accolti dal pubblico; tra gli ammiratori della sua poesia era Roberto Browning, che due anni dopo la sposava (1846), togliendola a quella vita di isolamento e di melanconia e infondendole nuova speranza e vigore. La storia dell'amore

¹ Lettera a Mr. Horn, 5 ottobre 1843.

con Roberto Browning ispirò alla poetessa la famosa serie dei sonetti chiamati *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, ch'ella finse di tradurre dal portoghese e che offerse al marito dopo le nozze.

Dopo il matrimonio la Barret visse quasi sempre in Italia, nel palazzo Guidi a Firenze, celebrato da lei in *Casa Guidi Windows*. Nel 1856, dopo un viaggio in Inghilterra, pubblicò *Aurora Leigh*, il più lungo de' suoi poemi, specie di romanzo sociologico in gran parte di soggetto italiano, che, se ha bellezze poetiche, non è esente da gravi difetti. La Barret morì a Firenze nel giugno del 1861.

Godette molta fama a' suoi giorni e fu paragonata alla divina Saffo. Possiede invero le qualità che piacciono alla folla dei lettori, soprattutto il sentimento patetico, in lei assai vivo anche a causa delle condizioni speciali della sua vita; è inoltre religiosa, e le sue poesie di soggetto sacro, di cui la migliore è *Cowper's Grave*, le acquistarono le simpatie di una gran parte del pubblico inglese, come anche il delicato sentimento umanitario del *Cry of the Children*, in cui la poetessa unisce la sua voce soave e commossa a quella di Dickens e di Thomas Hood per alleviare le sofferenze delle classi povere. Ma d'altra parte si deve riconoscere che molte delle sue poesie sono affrettate, più lunghe del necessario, che spesso i suoi pensieri sono puerili e i suoi entusiasmi, per quanto sinceri, ci lasciano indifferenti: ha molto sentimento, sottile immaginazione e potente ispirazione lirica, che talora degenera però in una commozione troppo scomposta e quasi convulsa. Inoltre il suo verso è raramente perfetto: conia nuove parole o ne usa di assai ricercate, e le sue rime son tra le più sgradite all'orecchio. Nel sonetto, invece, che per la sua struttura doveva frenare la volubile facilità della poetessa, riuscì squisitamente; e i suoi *Sonetti dal Portoghese*, pieni di delicato sentimento, espressione sincera di un cuore innamorato, resteranno sempre tra le gemme più belle che vanta la letteratura inglese.

FROM 'SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE'

I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
 Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
 Who each one, in a gracious hand, appears
 To bear a gift for mortals, old and young; *or (Opp. to Plato's Ed.)*
 And as I mused it in his antique tongue,
 I saw a gradual vision through my tears, *me*
 The sweet sad years, the melancholy years,
 Those of my own life, who by turns had flung *= cast*
 A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,²
 So weeping, how a mystic shape did move
 Behind me, and drew me backwards by the hair
 And a voice said in mastery, while I strove: *= masterfully*
 "Guess now who holds thee?" "Death", I said; but there
 The silver answer rang, — "Not Death, but Love".

XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought³
 Except for love's sake only. Do not say
 "I love her for her smile... her look... her way
 Of speaking gently,... for a trick⁴ of thought
 That falls in⁵ well with mine, and certes brought

¹ 'I sonetti dal Portoghese' sono la poesia più squisitamente intima della Barret. Li scrisse prima del matrimonio con Roberto Browning e a lui li dedicò dopo le nozze. *per d'altro!*

² *Aware.*

³ *Nothing.*

⁴ *Trick*, qui vuol dire *abitudine, maniera.* *peculiarly of thought consistent with my own.*

⁵ *To fall in* = convenire, armonizzare.

A sense of pleasant ease¹ on such a day" —
 For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
 Be changed, or change for thee, — and love so wrought²
 May be unwrought so.³ Neither love me for
 Thine own dear pity's⁴ wiping my cheeks dry, —
 Some one might well forget to weep who bore
 Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby.
 But love me for love's sake, that evermore
 Thou mayest love on through love's eternity.⁵

XVIII

I never gave a lock of hair away
 To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
 Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully
 I ring out to the full brown length,⁶ and say,
 "Take it", My day of youth went yesterday;
 My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,
 Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,⁷
 As girls do, anymore. It only may
 Now shade on two pale cheeks, the mark of tears,
 Taught drooping⁸ from the head that hangs aside
 Through sorrow's trick. I thought the funeral-shears
 Would take this first; but Love is justified:⁹
 Take it, thou, finding pure, from¹⁰ all those years,
 The kiss my mother left here when she died.

¹ Sollievo, gioia.

² Nato da queste cose.

³ Può allo stesso modo svanire.

⁴ Abbreviazione di *is*.

⁵ Cioè finché dura amore che è eterno.

⁶ Io disfò, distendo in tutta la sua bruna lunghezza.

⁷ Nè li adorno di fiori di rosa e di mirto.

⁸ Abituati a cadere (i capelli) ai due lati del capo.

⁹ Ebbe ragione.

¹⁰ From sta per After. = throughout

XXXV

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
 And be all to me? Shall I never miss *usual courtesy*
 Home-talk and blessing, and the common kiss
 That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange, *pleasantly felt*
 When I look up, to drop on a new range
 Of walls and floors... another home than this?
 Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
 Filled by dead eyes, too tender to know change?
 That's hardest! If to conquer love has tried = *is trying hard (for you)*
 To conquer grief tries more... as all things prove:
 For grief indeed is love, and grief beside. *be loved (by you)*
 Alas I have grieved so I am hard to love = *1/et*
 You love me, wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,
 And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

XXXVIII

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed
 The fingers of this hand wherewith I write,
 And ever since it grew more clean and white —
 Slow to world-greetings¹ — quick with its "Oh list!"
 When the angels speak.² A ring of amethyst
 I could not wear here plainer to my sight, *more open*
 Than that first kiss. The second passed in height
 The first and sought the forehead, and half missed,³

¹ Restia ai saluti mondani. *unwilling*

² Oh list! = ascolta; si può tradurre: pronta ai cenni degli angeli.

³ E mezzo si perse.

Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed!¹
That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third, upon my lips, was folded down
In perfect, purple state!² since when indeed
I have been proud and said, "My Love, my own".

¹ *Meed* = dono: *beyond meed!* dono supremo!

² *State* = pompa; fu deposto perfetto, solenne, sulle mie labbra.

CARLO DICKENS

1812-1870

Carlo Dickens, il più tipico degli scrittori dell'età vittoriana, nacque nel 1812 a Landport, presso Portsmouth, dove suo padre era impiegato nell'amministrazione della marina. Due anni dopo la nascita di Dickens, la famiglia si stabilì a Londra, dove si trovò in gravi angustie finanziarie, tanto che il padre dovette passar molto tempo nella prigione dei debitori a Marshalsea, che Dickens rese poi famosa, descrivendola con tanta forza di verità in *Little Dorrit*. In tali frangenti il piccolo ragazzo fu messo a lavorare per pochi scellini alla settimana in una fabbrica di lucido da scarpe, e passò giorni miserissimi nei quartieri più poveri della città: triste esperienza, che doveva giovargli meravigliosamente nella composizione dei suoi romanzi, in cui son tratteggiati con realismo insuperato i varii tipi della classe bassa londinese. Ma non tardarono i giorni migliori. Suo padre trovò da occuparsi come *reporter*, e anche Dickens, dopo aver frequentato per qualche tempo le scuole, si diede alla stessa professione, acquistandovi grande reputazione.

Il primo suo lavoro originale furono gli *Sketches by Boz*, pubblicati nel 1833 nel *Monthly Magazine*, esilarantissimi quadretti « di genere » accolti con gran favore dal pubblico. Incoraggiato dal buon successo, cominciò nel 1836 la pubblicazione in parti mensili dei famosi *Pickwick Papers*, illustrati da lui stesso, che rivelarono un vero genio nella creazione di situazioni comiche, uno spirito di straordinaria giocondità e di inesauribile brio. Con questo lavoro egli ritorna

al vecchio tipo nazionale di romanzo, allo studio di eccentricità, di incidenti umoristici in cui era stato maestro, nel settecento, lo Smollet. Ed ora Dickens con una attività e fecondità straordinaria di immaginazione pubblicò in rapida successione una lunga serie di romanzi, dei quali ognuno, nel suo genere, è un capolavoro: *Oliver Twist* (1837), pittura realistica dei bassi fondi di Londra; *Nicholas Nickleby*, ove al comico si unisce felicemente la parte sentimentale; *Old Curiosity Shop*, con la soave figura di Little Nell, forse un po' troppo idealizzata; *Barnaby Rudge*, in cui Dickens tentò felicemente il romanzo storico. Un viaggio in America, intrapreso nel 1842, gli suggerì le *American Notes* e *Martin Chuzzlewit*, felice satira delle stranezze degli Americani, che però non la trovarono di loro gusto e serbarono rancore allo scrittore di oltre Atlantico. L'anno dopo cominciò a pubblicare per il Natale i suoi deliziosi *Christmas Books*; il primo fu *The Christmas Carol* con la patetica figura di Tiny Tim; poi *The Chimes* e il famoso *Cricket on the Hearth* (1845). Il maggior lavoro di Dickens è *David Copperfield*, romanzo quasi autobiografico, pieno come è di reminiscenze della sua prima gioventù. È il suo capolavoro, la più perfetta delle sue opere per unità di struttura, per finezza di particolari, e contiene alcune delle creazioni più famose del grande scrittore: basti ricordare Mr. Micawber, Mr. Dick e Miss Betsy Trotwood.

Nel 1852, dopo aver lanciato un periodico, *Household Words*, scrisse *Bleak House* che, se ha dei difetti, soprattutto la lentezza dell'azione, è meraviglioso per il gran numero e la varietà dei personaggi che compaiono sulla scena. A questo seguirono *Hard Times*, satira potente dei metodi di educazione di allora, *Little Dorrit* e *Tale of Two Cities*, il secondo dei romanzi storici di Dickens, che ha per sfondo la rivoluzione francese e che contiene alcune delle sue migliori pagine descrittive. L'ultimo dei romanzi di Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, rimase incompiuto per la sua morte avvenuta nel 1870.

L'opera di Dickens non è certamente esente da difetti; ma alcuni critici vollero trovarci ciò che l'autore non intese mai di fare, delle qualità che lo scrittore assolutamente non

possedeva, perchè in antitesi al suo temperamento e al suo genio. È vero bensì che la lingua e lo stile sono spesso sciatti e risentono della fretta con cui il romanziere, non dimentico di essere stato giornalista, soleva scrivere; è vero che i suoi personaggi non sono mai tipi reali, che le sue creazioni rappresentano per lo più tipi speciali di virtù e di vizi anzichè personificazioni umane di queste qualità; ma questi individui ci sono presentati in un mondo tutto loro, con una luce speciale e con tanto vigor comico, con tanta vivacità, con tanta arte, che il nostro interesse non diminuisce mai, e non ci passa neppur per la mente di chiederci se certi suoi caratteri sono, in realtà, possibili. Dickens è inoltre un pittore perfetto che immagina con mirabile precisione tutti i colori del suo quadro. Ecco, per esempio, la descrizione di una tempesta, ove le immagini son prese alla luce di un lampo:

The eye, partaking of the quickness of the flashing light, saw in its every gleam a multitude of objects which it could not see at steady noon in fifty times that period. Bells in steeples, with the rope and wheel that moved them; ragged nests of birds in cornices and nooks; faces full of consternation in the tilted waggons that came tearing past, their frightened teams ringing out a warning which the thunder drowned; harrows and ploughs left out in fields; miles upon miles of hedge-divided country, with the distant fringe of trees as obvious as the scare-crow in the bean field close at hand: in a trembling, vivid, flickering instant, everything was clear and plain: then came a flush of red into the yellow light; a change to blue; a brightness so intense that there was nothing else but light: and then the deepest and profoundest darkness.¹

Chiunque legga Dickens nei suoi romanzi migliori, non può fare a meno di esserne interessato e deve spesso ammirarlo, affascinato dalla straordinaria versatilità del meraviglioso scrittore.

¹ *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ed. Tauchnitz, vol. II, pag. 245

SHOWING HOW MR. PICKWICK UNDERTOOK TO DRIVE,
AND MR. WINKLE TO RIDE; AND HOW THEY BOTH DID IT.

(From '*Pickwick Papers*'. Chap. v)

Bright and pleasant was the sky, balmy the air, and beautiful the appearance of every object around, as Mr. Pickwick leaned over the balustrades of Rochester Bridge, contemplating nature, and waiting for breakfast. The scene was indeed one which might well have charmed a far less reflective mind than that to which it was presented.

On the left of the spectator lay the ruined wall, broken in many places, and in some, overhanging the narrow beach below in rude and heavy masses. Huge knots of sea-weed hung upon the jagged and pointed stones, trembling in every breath of wind; and the green ivy clung mournfully round the dark and ruined battlements. Behind it rose the ancient castle, its towers roofless, and its massive walls crumbling away, but telling us proudly of its own might and strength, as when seven hundred years ago, it rang with the clash of arms, or resounded with the noise of feasting and revelry.

On either side, the banks of the Medway, covered with cornfields and pastures, with here and there a windmill or a distant church, stretched away as far as the eye could see, presenting a rich and varied landscape rendered more beautiful by the changing shadows which passed swiftly across it, as the thin and half-formed clouds skimmed away in the light of the morning sun. The river, reflecting the clear blue of the sky, glistened

and sparkled as it flowed noiselessly on; and the oars of the fishermen dipped into the water with a clear and liquid sound, as the heavy but picturesque boats glided slowly down the stream.

Mr. Pickwick was roused from the agreeable reverie into which he had been led by the objects before him, by a deep sigh, and a touch on his shoulder. He turned round: and the dismal man was at his side.

— Contemplating the scene? — inquired the dismal man.

— I was — said Mr. Pickwick.

— And congratulating yourself on being up so soon?

Mr. Pickwick nodded assent.

— Ah! people need to rise early to see the sun in all his splendour, for his brightness seldom lasts the day through. The morning of day and the morning of life are but too much alike. —

— You speak truly, sir — said Mr. Pickwick.

— How common the saying — continued the dismal man — the morning is too fine to last. How well might it be applied to our every day existence! God! what would I forfeit to have the days of my childhood restored, or to be able to forget them for ever! —

— You have seen much trouble, sir — said Mr. Pickwick, compassionately.

— I have, — said the dismal man, hurriedly — I have — more than those who see me now would believe possible. — He paused for an instant, and then said, abruptly, — did it ever strike you, on such a morning as this, that drowning would be happiness and peace? —

— God bless me, no! — replied Mr. Pickwick, edging a little from the balustrade, as the possibility of the dismal man's tipping him over, by way of experiment, occurred to him rather forcibly.

— I have thought so, often — said the dismal man, without noticing the action. — The calm, cool water seems to me to murmur an invitation to repose and rest. A bound, a splash, a brief struggle; there is an eddy for an instant, it gradually subsides into a gentle ripple; the waters have closed above your head, and the world has closed upon your miseries and misfortunes for ever. — The sunken eye of the dismal man flashed brightly as he spoke, but the momentary excitement quickly subsided; and he turned calmly away...

Mr. Pickwick found that his three companions had risen, and were waiting his arrival to commence breakfast, which was ready laid in tempting display. They sat down to the meal; and broiled ham, eggs, tea, coffee, and sundries began to disappear with a rapidity which at once bore testimony to the excellence of the fare and the appetites of its consumers.

— Now, about Manor Farm — said Mr. Pickwick — How shall we go? —

— We had better consult the waiter, perhaps, — said Mr. Tupman; and the waiter, was summoned accordingly.

— Dingley Dell, gentlemen — fifteen miles, gentlemen — cross road — post-chaise, sir? —

— Post-chaise won't hold more than two — said Mr. Pickwick.

— True, sir — beg your pardon, sir. Very nice four-wheeled chaise, sir — seat for two behind — one in front for the gentleman that drives. Oh! beg your pardon, sir — that'll only hold three. —

— What's to be done? — said Mr. Snodgrass.

— Perhaps one of the gentlemen like to ride, sir? — suggested the waiter, looking towards Mr. Winkle; — very good saddle-horses, sir — any of Mr. Wardle's men coming to Rochester bring 'em back, sir. —

— The very thing — said Mr. Pickwick — Winkle, will you go on horseback? —

Now Mr. Winkle did entertain considerable misgivings in the very lowest recesses of his own heart, relative to his equestrian skill; but, as he would not have them even suspected on any account, he at once replied with great hardihood, — Certainly, I should enjoy it of all things. — Mr. Winkle had rushed upon his fate; there was no resource. — Let them be at the door by eleven — said Mr. Pickwick. — Very well, sir — replied the waiter. The waiter retired; the breakfast concluded; and the travellers ascended to their respective bedrooms, to prepare a change of clothing, to take with them on their approaching expedition.

Mr. Pickwick had made his preliminary arrangements, and was looking over the coffee-room blinds at the passengers in the street, when the waiter entered, and announced that the chaise was ready — an announcement which the vehicle itself confirmed, by forthwith appearing before the coffee-room blinds aforesaid.

It was a curious little green box on four wheel, with a low place like a wine-bin for two behind, and an elevated perch for one in front, drawn by an immense brown horse, displaying great symmetry of bone. An hostler stood near, holding by the bridle another immense horse — apparently a near relative of the animal in the chaise — ready saddled for Mr. Winkle.

— Bless my soul! — said Mr. Pickwick, as they stood upon the pavement while the coats were being put in — bless my soul! who's to drive? I never thought of that. —

— Oh! you, of course, — said Mr. Tupman.

— Of course, — said Mr. Snodgrass.

— I! — exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

— Not the slightest fear, sir, — interposed the hostler. Warrant him quiet, sir; a hinfant in arms might drive him. —

— He don't shy, does he? inquired Mr. Pickwick.

— Shy, sir? He wouldn't shy if he was to meet a waggin-load of monkeys with their tails burnt off. —

The last recommendation was indisputable. Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass got into the bin; Mr. Pickwick ascended to his perch, and deposited his feet on a floorcloth shelf, erected beneath it for that purpose.

— Now Shiny William — said the hostler to the deputy-hostler — give the gen'lm'n the ribbins.¹ — Shiny William — so called, probably, from his sleek hair and oily countenance — placed the reins in Mr. Pickwick's left hand; and the upper hostler thrust the whip into his right.

— Wo — o! — cried Mr. Pickwick, as the tall quadruped evinced a decided inclination to back into the coffee-room window.

— Wo — o! — echoed Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass, from the bin.

— Only his playfulness, gen'l'm — said the head hostler, encouragingly. — Jist kitch hold² on him, William. — The deputy restrained the animal's impetuosity, and the principal ran to assist Mr. Winkle in mounting.

— T'other side, sir, if you please. —

— Blowed if the gen'lm'n worn't a gettin' up the wrong side — whispered a grinning post-boy to the inexpressibly gratified waiter.

¹ Le redini.

² Catch hold of.

Mr. Winkle, thus instructed, climbed into his saddle, with about as much difficulty as he would have experienced in getting up the side of a first-rate man-of-war.

— All right? — inquired Mr. Pickwick, with an inward presentiment that it was all wrong.

— All right — replied Mr. Winkle, faintly.

— Let 'em go — cried the hostler — hold him in sir — and away went the chaise, and the saddle-horse, with Mr. Pickwick on the box of the one, and Mr. Winkle on the back of the other, to the delight and gratification of the whole innyard.

— What makes him go sideways? — said Mr. Snodgrass in the bin, to Mr. Winkle in the saddle.

— I can't imagine — replied Mr. Winkle. His horse was drifting up the street in the most mysterious manner — side first, with his head towards one side of the way, and his tail towards the other.

Mr. Pickwick had no leisure to observe either this or any other particular, the whole of his faculties being concentrated in the management of the animal attached to the chaise, who displayed various peculiarities, highly interesting to a bystander, but by no means equally amusing to any one seated behind him. Besides constantly jerking his head up, in a very unpleasant and uncomfortable manner, and tugging at the reins to an extent which rendered it a matter of great difficulty for Mr. Pickwick to hold them, he had a singular propensity for darting suddenly every now and then to the side of the road, then stopping short, and then rushing forward for some minutes, at a speed which it was wholly impossible to control.

— What *can* he mean by this? — said Mr. Snodgrass, when the horse had executed this manoeuvre for the twentieth time.

— I don't know — replied Mr. Tupman — it *looks* very like shying, don't it? — Mr. Snodgrass was about to reply, when he was interrupted by a shout from Mr. Pickwick.

— Wo — o! — said that gentleman: — I have dropped my whip. —

— Winkle, — cried Mr. Snodgrass, as the equestrian came trotting up on the tall horse, with his hat over his ears, and shaking all over, as if he would shake to pieces with the violence of the exercise — pick up the whip, there's a good fellow. — Mr. Winkle pulled at the bridle of the tall horse till he was black in the face; and having at length succeeded in stopping him, dismounted, handed the whip to Mr. Pickwick, and grasping the reins, prepared to remount.

Now, whether the tall horse, in the natural playfulness of his disposition, was desirous of having a little innocent recreation with Mr. Winkle, or whether it occurred to him that he could perform the journey as much to his own satisfaction without a rider as with one, are points upon which, of course, we can arrive at no definite and distinct conclusion. By whatever motives the animal was actuated, certain it is that Mr. Winkle had no sooner touched the reins than he slipped them over his head, and darted backwards to their full length.

— Poor fellow, — said Mr. Winkle, soothingly — poor fellow — good old horse. — The 'poor fellow' was proof against flattery: the more Mr. Winkle tried to get nearer him, the more he sidled away; and notwithstanding all kinds of coaxing and wheedling, there were Mr. Winkle and the horse going round and round each other for ten minutes, at the end of which time each was at precisely the same distance from the other as when they first commenced — an unsatisfactory sort of thing

under any circumstances, but particularly so in a lonely road, where no assistance can be procured.

— What am I to do? — shouted Mr. Winkle, after the dodging had been prolonged for a considerable time.

— What am I to do? I can't get on him. —

— You had better lead him till we come to a turn-pike — replied Mr. Pickwick from the chaise.

— But he won't come! — roared Mr. Winkle. — Do come and hold him. —

Mr. Pickwick was the very personation of kindness and humanity: he threw the reins on the horse's back, and having descended from his seat, carefully drew the chaise into the hedge, lest anything should come along the road, and stepped back to the assistance of his distressed companion, leaving Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass in the vehicle.

The horse no sooner beheld Mr. Pickwick advancing towards him with the chaise whip in his hand, than he exchanged the rotory motion in which he had previously indulged for a retrograde movement of so very determined a character, that it at once drew Mr. Winkle, who was still at the end of the bridle, at a rather quicker rate than fast walking, in the direction from which they had just come. Mr. Pickwick ran to his assistance, but the faster Mr. Pickwick ran forward, the faster the horse ran backward. There was a great scraping of feet and kicking up of the dust; and at last Mr. Winkle, his arms being nearly pulled out of their sockets, fairly let go his hold. The horse paused, stared, shook his head, turned round, and quietly trotted home to Rochester, leaving Mr. Winkle and Mr. Pickwick gazing on each other with countenances of blank dismay. A rattling noise at a little distance attracted their attention. They looked up.

— Bless my soul! — exclaimed the agonized Mr. Pickwick, — there's the other horse running away!

It was but too true. The animal was startled by the noise, and the reins were on his back. The result may be guessed. He tore off with the four-wheeled chaise behind him, and Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass in the four-wheeled chaise. The heat was a short one. Mr. Tupman threw himself into the hedge, Mr. Snodgrass followed his example, the horse dashed the four-wheeled chaise against a wooden bridge, separated the wheels from the body, and the bin from the perch; and finally stood stock-still to gaze upon the ruin he had made.

FROM 'DAVID COPPERFIELD'

(Chap. 1)

My name is David Copperfield. My father died before I was born. My dear, beautiful young mother, our old servant Peggotty — her Christian name, Clara, was the same as my mother's — and I lived alone at a house called the Rookery, where there were no rooks, at Blunderstone, in Suffolk. We were very happy, until I was about seven years old, when an event happened, which changed the course of our lives.

Peggotty and I were sitting one night by the parlour fire, alone. I had been reading to Peggotty about crocodiles. I was dead sleepy; but having leave, as a high treat, to sit up until my mother came home from spending the evening at a neighbour's, I would rather have died upon my post than have gone to bed. Peggotty seemed to swell and grow immensely large. I propped my eyelids open with my two forefingers, and looked perseveringly at her as she sat at work; at the little bit of wax

candle she kept for her thread; at the little house with thatched roof, where the yard-measure lived; at her work-box with a sliding lid, with a view of St. Paul's Cathedral (with a pink dome) painted on the top; at the brass thimble on her finger; at herself, whom I thought lovely.

«Peggotty», said I, suddenly, «were you ever married?».

«Lord, Master Davy», replied Peggotty. «What's put marriage in your head?».

She answered with such a start that it quite awoke me.

«I don't know! You mustn't marry more than one person at a time, may you, Peggotty?».

«Certainly not», says Peggotty, with the promptest decision.

«But if you marry a person, and the person dies, why then you may marry another person, mayn't you, Peggotty?».

«You *may*», says Peggotty, «if you choose, my dear. That's a matter of opinion».

«But what is your opinion, Peggotty?» said I.

I asked her, and looked curiously at her, because she looked so curiously at me.

«My opinion is», said Peggotty, taking her eyes from me, after a little indecision and going on with her work, «that I never was married myself, Master Davy, and that I don't expect to be. That's all I know about the subject».

She laid aside her work, and opening her arms wide, took my curly head within them, and gave it a good squeeze.

«Now let me hear some more about the crotchkindills», said Peggotty, who was not quite right in the name yet, «for I ain't heard half enough».

We had exhausted the crocodiles, and begun with the alligators, when the garden-bell rang. We went out to the door; and there was my mother, looking unusually pretty, I thought, and with her a gentleman with beautiful black hair and whiskers, who had walked home with us from church last Sunday. I never saw such a beautiful colour on my mother's face before. She turned to thank the gentleman for taking so much trouble as to bring her home, and glanced, I thought, at me.

«Come! Let us be the best friends in the world!» said the gentleman, laughing. «Shake hands!»

My right hand was in my mother's left, so I gave him the other.

«Why, that's the wrong hand, Davy!» laughed the gentleman.

My mother drew my right hand forward, but I was resolved not to give it him, and I did not. He said, «Good-night» and the door was shut.

It seems to me, at this distance of time, as if it were the next day when Peggotty broached the striking and adventurous proposition I am about to mention: but it was probably about two months afterwards.

We were sitting one evening (when my mother was out as before), in company with the box with Saint Paul's on the lid, and the crocodile book, when Peggotty, after looking at me several times, said coaxingly:

«Master Davy, how should you like to go along with me and spend a fortnight at my brother's at Yarmouth? Wouldn't *that* be a treat?».

«Is your brother an agreeable man, Peggotty?» I inquired, provisionally.

«Oh, what an agreeable man he is!» cried Peggotty, holding up her hands. «Then there's the sea; and the

boats and ships; and the fishermen; and the beach; and 'Am to play with».

Peggotty meant her nephew Ham; but she spoke of him as a morsel of English Grammar.

I was flushed by her summary of delights, and replied that it would indeed be a treat, but what would my mother say?

«Why then I'll as good as bet a guinea», said Peggotty, intent upon my face, «that she'll let us go. I'll ask her, if you like, as soon as ever she comes home. There now!»

«But what's she to do while we are away?» said I, putting my small elbows on the table to argue the point. «She can't live by herself».

«Oh bless you!» said Peggotty, looking at me again. «Don't you know? She's going to stay for a fortnight with Mrs. Grayper. Mrs. Grayper's going to have a lot of company».

Oh! If that was it, I was quite ready to go. I waited, in the utmost impatience, until my mother came home to ascertain if we could get leave to carry out this great idea. Without being nearly so much surprised as I expected, my mother entered into it readily; and it was all arranged that night, and my board and lodging during the visit were to be paid for.

The day soon came. We were to go in a carrier's cart in the morning. I would have given any money to have been allowed to wrap myself up over-night, and sleep in my hat and boots.

It touches me nearly now to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what I did leave for ever. But when the carrier's cart was at the gate, and my mother stood there kissing me, a grateful fondness for her and for

the old place made me cry. I am glad to know that my mother cried too, and that I felt her heart beat against mine.

As we left her standing in the road, the black-whiskered man, Mr. Murdstone, came up and seemed to expostulate with her for being so moved. I wondered what business it was of his. Peggotty also seemed anything but satisfied.

DAVID COPPERFIELD'S EARLIEST IMPRESSIONS AT CHURCH

(From *David Copperfield*)

Here is our pew in the church. What a high-backed pew! With a window near it, out of which our house can be seen, and *is* seen many times during the morning's service, by Peggotty,¹ who likes to make herself as sure as she can that it's not being robbed or is not in flames. But though Peggotty's eye wanders, she is much offended if mine does, and frowns to me, as I stand upon the seat, that I am to look at the clergyman. But I can't always look at him — I know him without that white thing on, and I am afraid of his wondering why I stare so, and perhaps stopping the service to enquire — and what am I to do? It's a dreadful thing to gape, but I must do something. I look at my mother but *she* pretends not to see me. I look at a boy in the aisle, and *he* makes faces at me. I look at the sunlight coming in at the open door through the porch, and there I see a stray sheep — I don't mean a sinner, but mutton — half making up his mind to come into the church. I feel that if I looked at him any longer, I might be tempted

¹ Governante di David.

to say something out loud; and what would become of me then. I look up at the monumental tablets¹ on the wall, and try to think of Mr. Bodgers late of this parish, and what the feelings of Mrs. Bodgers must have been, when affliction sore, long time Mr. Bodgers bore, and physicians were in vain.² I wonder whether they called in Mr. Chillip,³ and he was in vain; and if so, how he likes to be reminded of it once a week. I look from Mr. Chillip, in his Sunday neckcloth, to the pulpit; and think what a good place it would be to play in, and what a castle it would make, with another boy coming up the stairs to attack it, and having the velvet cushion with the tassels thrown down on his head. In time my eyes gradually shut up; and, from seeming to hear the clergyman singing a drowsy song in the heat, I hear nothing, until I fall off the seat with a crash, and am taken out, more dead than alive, by Peggotty.

SAMUEL WELLER MAKES A PILGRIMAGE TO DORKING,
AND BEHOLDS HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW⁴

(From «Pickwick Papers». Chap. xxviii)

The Marquis of Granby⁵ in Mrs. Weller's time was quite a model of a roadside public-house of the better class — just large enough to be convenient, and

¹ Lapi dei monumenti.

² David legge l'epigrafe di un monumento.

³ Mr. Chillip è il medico di casa.

⁴ Samuel Weller, uno dei tipi più caratteristici creati da Dickens, è il servo di Mr. Pickwick. In questo capitolo si racconta la prima visita che Samuel fa alla sua matrigna che tiene osteria a Dorking. Il padre di Samuel fa il vetturale. Qui *mother-in-law* è usato impropriamente per *step-mother*.

⁵ Nome dell'osteria tenuta da Mrs. W. — Il *Marquis of Granby* fu un generale assai popolare del settecento.

small enough to be snug.¹ — On the opposite side of the road was a large signboard on a high post, representing the head and shoulders of a gentleman with an apoplectic countenance, in a red coat with deep blue facings, and a touch of the same blue over his three-cornered hat for a sky. Over that again were a pair of flags; beneath the last button of his coat were a couple of cannon: and the whole formed an expressive and undoubted likeness of the Marquis of Granby of glorious memory.

The bar window displayed a choice collection of geranium plants, and a well dusted row of spirit phials. The open shutters bore a variety of golden inscriptions, eulogistic of good beds and neat wines: and the choice group of country-men and hostlers lounging about the stable-door and horse-trough afforded presumptive proof of the excellent quality of the ale and spirits which were sold within. Sam Weller paused, when he dismounted from the coach, to note all these little indications of a thriving business with the eye of an experienced traveller; and having done so, stepped in at once, highly satisfied with everything he had observed. « Now, then », said a shrill female voice, the instant Sam thrust in his head at the door, « what do you want, young man? ».

Sam looked round in the direction whence the voice proceeded. It came from a rather stout lady of comfortable appearance, who was seated beside the fireplace in the bar, blowing the fire to make the kettle boil for tea. She was not alone: for on the other side of the fireplace, sitting bolt upright² in a high-backed chair,

¹ Raccolta, comoda.

² Dritto come un palo.

was a man in threadbare black clothes, with a back almost as long and stiff as that of the chair itself, who caught Sam's most particular and especial attention at once. He was a prim-faced, red-nosed man, with a long, thin countenance, and a semi-rattlesnake sort of eye¹ rather sharp, but decidedly bad. He wore very short trousers, and black-cotton stockings, which, like the rest of his apparel were particularly rusty. His looks were starched, but his white neckerchief was not, and its long limp ends straggled over his closely-buttoned waistcoat in a very uncouth and unpicturesque fashion. A pair of old, worn beaver gloves, a broad-trimmed hat, and a faded green umbrella, with plenty of whalebone sticking through the bottom, as if to counterbalance the want of a handle at the top, lay on a chair beside him, and being disposed in a very tidy and careful manner, seemed to imply that the red-nosed man, whoever he was, had no intention of going away in a hurry.

To do the red-nosed man justice, he would have been very far from wise if he had entertained any such intention; for, to judge from all appearances, he must have been possessed of a most desirable circle of acquaintance if he could have reasonably expected to be more comfortable anywhere else. The fire was blazing brightly under the influence of the bellows, and the kettle was singing gaily under the influence of both. A small tray of tea-things was arranged on the table, a plate of hot buttered toast was gently simmering before the fire, and the red-nosed man himself was busily engaged in converting a large slice of bread into the same agreeable edible, through the instrumentality of a

¹ Un occhio che somigliava quasi a quello di un serpente a sonagli.

long brass toasting-fork. Beside him stood a glass of reeking hot pine-apple rum and water, with a slice of lemon in it; and every time the red-nosed man stopped to bring the round of bread to his eye, with the view of ascertaining how it got on, he imbibed a drop or two of the hot pine-apple rum and water and smiled upon the rather stout lady as she blew the fire.

Sam was so lost in the contemplation of this comfortable scene, that he suffered the first inquiry of the rather stout lady to pass unheeded. It was not until it had been twice repeated, each time in a shriller tone, that he became conscious of the impropriety of his behaviour. « Governor in? »¹ inquired Sam, in reply to the question.

« No, he isn't », replied Mrs. Weller: for the rather stout lady was no other than the quondam relict² and sole executrix of the dead and gone Mr. Clarke; « no, he isn't, and I don't expect him, either ».

« I suppose he's a driving up to-day? » said Sam.

« He may be, or he may not », replied Mrs. Weller, buttering the round of toast which the red-nosed man had just finished. « I don't know, and what's more, I don't care. — Ask a blessing,³ Mr. Stiggins ». The red-nosed man did as he was desired, and instantly commenced on the toast with fierce voracity. The appearance of the red-nosed man had induced Sam at first sight to more than half suspect that he was the deputy shepherd⁴ of whom his estimable parent had spoken. The moment he saw him eat, all doubt on the subject was removed.

¹ *Governor* in dialetto sta per *father*.

² Vedova.

³ Chiedete la benedizione (prima di mangiare).

⁴ Vice-parroco.

and he perceived at once, that if he purposed to take up his temporary quarters where he was, he must make his footing good without delay. He therefore commenced proceedings by putting his arm over the half-door of the bar, coolly unbolting it, and leisurely walking in. « Mother-in-law », said Sam, « how are you? » « Why, I do believe he is a Weller! » said Mrs. W., raising her eyes to Sam's face, with no very gratified expression of countenance.

« I rayther¹ think he is », said the imperturbable Sam; « and I hope this here reverend gen'l'm'n 'll excuse me saying that I wish I was the Weller as² owns³ you, mother-in-law ».

This was a double-barrelled compliment. It implied that Mrs. Weller was a most agreeable female, and also that Mr. Stiggins had a clerical appearance. It made a visible impression at once: and Sam followed up⁴ his advantage by kissing his mother-in-law.

« Get along with you! » said Mrs. Weller, pushing him away.

« For shame, young man! » said the gentleman with the red nose.

« No offence, sir, no offence » replied Sam. « You're very right, though: it ain't⁵ the right sort o' thing wen mothers-in-law is young and good-looking, is it, sir? »

« It's all vanity », said Mr. Stiggins.

« Ah, so it is », said Mrs. Weller, setting her cap to rights.

¹ *Rather.*

² *That.*

³ *Own*, vuol dire possedere e confessare; qui è appunto usato in doppio senso come si vede nel periodo seguente.

⁴ *Approfittò.*

⁵ *It is not.*

Sam thought it was too, but he held his peace.

The deputy-shepherd seemed by no means best pleased with Sam's arrival: and when the first effervescence of the compliment had subsided, even Mrs. Weller looked as if she could have spared him without the smallest inconvenience. However, there he was: and as he couldn't be decently turned out, they all three sat down to tea.

« And how's father? » said Sam.

At this inquiry Mrs. Weller raised her hands and turned up her eyes, as if the subject were to painful to be alluded to.

Mr. Stiggins groaned.

« What's the matter with that'ere¹ gen'l'm'n? » inquired Sam.

« He is shocked at the way your father goes on in », replied Mrs. Weller.

« Oh, he is, is he? » said Sam.

« And with too good reason » added Mrs. Weller, gravely.

Mr. Stiggins took up a fresh piece of toast and groaned heavily.

« He is a dreadful reprobate », said Mrs. Weller.

« A man of wrath! » exclaimed Mr. Stiggins. He took a large semicircular bite out of the toast and groaned again.

Sam felt very strongly disposed to give she reverend Mr. Stiggins something to groan for, but he repressed his inclination, and merely asked, « What's the old 'un up to,² now? »

¹ *There.*

² *To be up to (one's tricks)* = farne delle sue: cosa sta facendo il nostro vecchio ora?

« Up to, indeed! » said Mrs. Weller.

« Oh, he has a hard heart. Night after night does this excellent man — don't frown, Mr. Stiggins: I *will* say you *are* an excellent man — come and sit here, for hours together, and it has not the least effect upon him ».

« Well, that is odd », said Sam « it 'ud ¹ have a wery considerable effect upon me if I wos in his place. I know that ».

« The fact is, my young friend », said Mr. Stiggins, solemnly, « he has an obderrate ² bosom. Oh, my young friend, who else could have resisted the pleading of sixteen of our fairest sisters, and withstood their exhortations to subscribe to our noble society for providing the infant negroes in the West Indies with flannel waistcoats and moral pocket handkerchiefs? »

« What's a moral pocket ankercher? » said Sam: I never saw one o' them articles o' furnitur ».

« Those who combine amusement with instruction, my young friend », replied Mr. Stiggins: « blending select tales with woodcuts ».

« Oh, I know », said Sam; « them as hangs up in the linen-drappers shops, with beggars' petitions and all that 'ere upon 'em? ».

Mr. Stiggins began a third round of toast, and nodded assent.

« And he wouldn't be persuaded by the ladies, wouldn't he? » said Sam.

« Sat and smoked his pipe, and said the infant negroes were — what did he say the infant negroes were? » said Mrs. Weller.

¹ *It would.*

² *Indurito.*

« Little humbugs », replied Mr. Stiggins, deeply affected.

« Said the infant negroes were little humbugs », repeated Mrs. Weller. And they both groaned at the atrocious conduct of the old gentleman. A great many more iniquities of a similar nature might have been disclosed, only the toast being all eaten, and the tea having got very weak, and Sam holding out no indications of meaning to go, Mr. Stiggins suddenly recollected that he had a most pressing appointment with the shepherd, and took himself off accordingly. The tea-things had been scarcely put away, and the hearth swept up, when the London coach deposited Mr. Weller, senior, at the door: his legs deposited him in the bar: and his eyes showed him his son.

« What, Sammy! » exclaimed the father.

« What, old Nobs! ¹ » ejaculated the son.

And they shook hand heartily.

« Very glad to see you, Sammy », said the elder Mr. Weller, « though how you've managed to get over your mother-in-law is a mystery to me. I only wish you'd write me out the receipt, that's all ».

« Hush! » said Sam, « she's at home, old feller ».

« She ain't within hearing », replied Mr. Weller, « she always goes and blows up downstairs for a couple of hours after tea: so we'll just give ourselves a damp, Sammy ». Saying this, Mr. Weller mixed two glasses of spirits and water, and produced a couple of pipes. The father and son sitting down opposite each other — Sam on one side of the fire, in a high-backed chair, and Mr. Weller, senior, on the other, in an easy ditto

¹ *Old fellow.*

— they proceeded to enjoy themselves with all due gravity.

« Anybody been here, Sammy? » asked Mr. Weller, senior, drily, after a long silence.

Sam nodded an expressive assent.

« Red-nosed chap? » inquired Mr. Weller.

Sam nodded again.

« Amiable man that'ere Sammy », said Mr. Weller, smoking violently.

« Seems so », observed Sam.

« Good hand at account », said Mr. Weller.

« Is he? » said Sam.

« Borrows eighteenpence on Monday, and comes on Tuesday for a shilling to make it up half a crown; calls again on Wensday for another half crown to make it five shillings; and goes on, doubling, till he gets it up to a five pund note, in no time, like them sums in the 'rithmetic book 'bout the nails in the horses' shoes, Sammy ».

Sam intimated by a nod that he recollected the problem alluded to by his parent.

« So you wouldn't subscribe to the flannel veskits? » said Sam after another interval of smoking.

« Cert'nly not », replied Mr. Weller; « what's the good o' flannel veskits ¹ to the young niggers ² abroad? »

« But I'll tell you what it is, Sammy » said Mr. Weller, lowering his voice and bending across the fireplace:

« I'd come down verry handsome ³ towards strait-veskits ⁴ for some people at home ».

¹ *Waistcoats.*

² *Negroes.*

³ *Darei una bella somma.*

⁴ *Camicia di forza.*

As Mr. Weller said this, he slowly recovered his former position, and winked at his first-born in a profound manner.

« It cert'nly seems a queer start ¹ to send out pocket ankerchers to people as ² don't know the use on 'em » observed Sam.

¹ Idea.

² Who.

LORD TENNYSON

1809-1892

Alfredo Tennyson nacque nel 1809 a Somersby, villaggio della contea di Lincoln, di cui suo padre era parroco. A sette anni fu mandato a scuola a Louth, ma continuò poi a studiare privatamente sotto la guida del padre, uomo di varia e soda cultura, finchè non entrò all'Università di Cambridge. Ivi seguì di mala voglia gli studi, che gli sembravano troppo aridi e positivi e nulla affatto interessanti; ¹ si distinse però guadagnando il premio per la poesia. Nel 1830, dopo aver già pubblicato da studente un promettente volumetto di versi scritti in collaborazione col fratello Carlo, mandò alle stampe una raccolta di poesie dal titolo *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, tra le quali alcune, come *Claribel*, *Mariana*, *The Dying Swan*, portano l'impronta di un genio originale: certo vi si sente un nuovo ritmo, uno stile pittorico, una meravigliosa musica raggiunta con la combinazione di elementi classici e romantici; ed in questo era stato preceduto da Keats, di cui si sente qualche riflesso specialmente in *Mariana*:

*Her tears fell with the dews at even;
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
She could not look on the sweet heaven,
Either at noon or eventide.*

¹ Cfr. TENNYSON by *Sir Alfred Lyall*. Macmillan, 1905.

Invece nel *Dying Swan* si hanno descrizioni vive e colorite, di soavissima melodia:

*Some blue peaks in the distance rose,
And white against the cold white sky.
Shone out their crowning snows.
One willow over the river wept,
And shook the wave as the wind did sigh;
Above in the wind was the swallow,
Chasing himself, at its own wild will,
And far thro' the marish green and still
The tangled water-courses slept,
Shot over with purple, and green, and yellow.*

Ma quel che piacque di più nel volume furono i suoi finissimi ritratti femminili, *Adeline, Eléonore, Madeline*: delicate miniature, ove ogni parola è come una tinta armonizzata e sfumata dalla tinta vicina, come in un delizioso pastello.

Due anni dopo (1832) Tennyson pubblicò un'altra raccolta di *Poems*, che porta ancor più visibile l'impronta della sua individualità poetica. Quel volume contiene, tra le altre liriche, *Ænone* il primo de' suoi studi classici in versi sciolti maestosi quanto quelli di Milton, *A Dream of Fair Women*, *The Lady of Shalott*, e *The Lotos-Eaters*, pieni di profondo sentimento, espresso in una musica sottile, melodiosa, e affascinante:

*But evermore
Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then some one said, ' We will return no more ':
And all at once they sang, ' Our island home
Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam '.*

Ma anche Tennyson cantava prima dell'alba del suo giorno, e non sfuggì alle critiche severe della *Quarterly Review* e del *Blackwood Magazine*. E il poeta tacque per dieci anni,

trascorsi nella solitudine della campagna, lavorando in silenzio a perfezionare l'arte sua, finchè nel 1842 si presentò di nuovo al pubblico con altri due volumi di *Poems*, dei quali il primo conteneva principalmente una scelta delle sue prime poesie rivedute mentre il secondo era tutto di poesie nuove, quali il soave idillio (cioè *quadretto*, visione raccolta e rappresentata quasi in iscorcio, — secondo l'etimologia greca del vocabolo —) *The Gardener's Daughter*, *Locksley Hall*, di impeto byroniano, vibrante dei forti accenti della passione, *Olysses*, e la *Morte D'Arthur*, preludio ai futuri *Idylls of the King*.

La procellosa generazione di poeti dei primi dell'ottocento era passata come un uragano tra scoppi di folgore, sprazzi di sole e lembi di cielo azzurro: si desiderava ora un po' di sereno; e la poesia di Tennyson, che riuniva felicemente tutte le forme e le idee che più eran piaciute in quei poeti, fu accolta con gioia, e il poeta fu salutato il primo del suo tempo e del suo paese.

Nel 1847 diede in luce *The Princess*, brillante fantasia che ha tutti i colori della rinascenza, espressa da una vena leggermente comica sull'argomento della emancipazione della donna. Il verso sciolto è fluido, melodioso, e le brevi liriche di cui è cosparso il poema son tra le cose più belle e più fine del Tennyson. Nel 1850 apparve *In Memoriam*, l'inspirata elegia scritta per la morte dell'amico Arthur Hallam, che alcuni critici considerano come il suo capolavoro e che gode sempre immensa popolarità, poichè nella elegia vi sono due note dominanti; una personale, il ricordo e il dolore per la perdita dell'amico; l'altra, la nota umana, il gran problema della vita e della morte; fondendo questi due elementi, il poeta ha idealizzato l'argomento dell'elegia e l'ha resa d'interesse universale. I versi hanno una melodia lenta e soave: il poeta è riuscito con arte consumata a dare allo stesso metro una gran varietà di movimento interiore (*Il cantar che nell'anima si sente* diceva il nostro Petrarca) mediante lo spostamento dell'accento, affermandosi così il più gran maestro di armonie inglesi che fosse fino allora mai apparso.

Dall'*In Memoriam* del Tennyson venne a Giuseppe Chiarini — gentile spirito di critico e di poeta, de' più fervidi a propugnare in Italia il culto e l'ammirazione dei grandi poeti stranieri — l'ispirazione per così dire formale alle sue *Lacrymae* in memoria del suo primogenito Dante rapitogli nel fior degli anni e delle più trepide speranze. Sono il capolavoro delle poesie del Chiarini.¹ E invero la paterna angoscia erompe calda, ma non irrompe sfrenata dall'anima del poeta, trattenuta esteticamente — sia pure a gran pena — da un così nobile sforzo di decorosa dignità umana, che quelle elegie danno immagine di un candido avello su cui, in una profonda notte stellata, piovano freddi e miti gli splendori lunari dentro un Camposanto. Tutto ciò dà ben diritto a questo capolavoro di essere ricordato dopo l'*In Memoriam* del Tennyson; e certo allo studioso delle due letterature l'elegia del poeta inglese richiamerà sempre quella del poeta italiano.

Il Tennyson nel 1853, arricchitosi col frutto dei suoi lavori, acquistò la terra di Farringford nell'isola di Wight con la graziosa villetta ricoperta di folta edera, in vista del mare. Nel 1855 pubblicò il più appassionato dei suoi poemi, specie di diario intimo di un giovane innamorato, diario in cui vibra una nota drammatica e lirica alta e potente. Dopo *Maud* Tennyson ritorna ai suoi sogni dorati, e scrive i primi *Idyls of the King*; *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, *Guenevere*, che continuò a pubblicare a varii intervalli, compiendoli nel 1889. Gli idilli sono una serie di quadretti separati, che han per soggetto la leggenda del re Arturo e dei suoi cavalieri, narrata in magnifici versi sciolti di una finezza artistica perfetta.

Alla morte di Wordsworth Tennyson gli succedette quale poeta laureato, e nel 1884 fu creato Lord dalla regina Vittoria. Morì nel 1892 nella sua casa di Alworth, dopo settant'anni di non interrotta gloria, e fu sepolto nell'abbazia di Westminster.

¹ *Poesie di G. C.*; libro III, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1903.

La poesia di Tennyson, scrive il Taine, somiglia alle belle sere d'estate: le linee del paesaggio son quelle stesse del giorno, ma lo splendore abbagliante della cupola si è smorzato; le piante rinfrescate si rialzano, e il sole calmo sul limite del cielo ravvolge armoniosamente in una rete di rosei raggi i boschi e le praterie che or ora ardeva con la sua luce intensa.¹ Tennyson è un innamorato dello stile e della bellezza, che cerca delle graziose scene campestri, dei commoventi ricordi, e ne fa delle elegie, delle pastorali e degli idilli. Compose in ogni metro e trasse argomento dalla vita di ogni secolo, e, ispirandosi a volta a volta a Omero, a Chaucer, a Teocrito, a Spenser, colse fiori da per tutto, rari o selvaggi, purchè fosser leggiadri e fragranti. Se un appunto gli si può fare con fondamento di verità, è che in ciò che scrisse dopo *The Princess* cercò troppo il soggetto della poesia invece di lasciarsi ispirare alla poesia dal soggetto; fu cioè troppo artista anzichè ispirato poeta. La sua lingua, benchè non di rado troppo manierata e preziosa, è il più puro inglese dell'ottocento: egli è il più grande artista della parola che vanta la letteratura inglese. — « I suoi versi, scrive il Saintbury, sono di gran lunga più perfetti di quelli di ogni altro poeta inglese, e hanno un'armonia insuperabile. Anche il colore e la linea nel renderci l'immagine visuale sono fondati su uno studio del fatto naturale e son trasfusi in parole con un'abilità somma. Prendete uno qualunque dei tanti versi tennysoniani, e la disposizione delle vocali e delle consonanti sarà una delizia per l'orecchio: lasciate che una qualunque delle sue mille descrizioni prenda forma innanzi al vostro occhio, e il quadro sarà come le cose viste in un sogno, ma più definite e più limpide ».²

Una certa idea della poesia e dell'arte di Alfredo Tennyson — di quelle ispirazioni erudite e fresche di gusto

¹ I. TAINÉ, *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise*, vol. v.

² G. SAINTBURY, *Nineteenth Century Literature*. Macmillan, 1908, pagina 268.

classicamente squisito, e della finezza di stile lavorato a sbalzo, e della musica interiore che segretamente anima i versi armonizzati con la sapienza degli antichi maestri, — la può dare a noi italiani, tra i poeti nostri odierni, Giovanni Pascoli; in particolar modo con quel *Paolo Vcello* che è la gemma incantata de' suoi recenti *Poemi italici*.¹

¹ Bologna, Zanichelli, (1911).

THE DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE

(From 'The Princess')

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

« Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail
That brings our friends up from the underworld⁴
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

« Ah sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange the days that are no more.

« Dear as remember'd kisses after death
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret:
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

⁴ Da lontane terre (le Americhe).

FROM 'IN MEMORIAM' ¹

A happy lover who has come
To look on her that loves him well,
Who 'lights and rings the gateway bell,
And learns her gone and far from home;

He saddens, all the magic light
Dies off at once from bower and hall,
And all the place is dark, and all
The chambers emptied of delight:

So find I every pleasant spot
In which we two were wont to meet,
The field, the chamber, and the street,
For all is dark where thou art not,

Yet as that other, wandering there
In those deserted walks, may find
A flower beat with rain and wind,
Which once she foster'd up with care;

So seems it in my deep regret,
O my forsaken heart, with thee
And this poor flower of poesy
Which, little cared for, fades not yet.

But since it pleased a vanish'd eye,
I go to plant it on his tomb,
That, if it can, it there may bloom,
Or dying, there at least may die.

¹ *In Memoriam*, il più lungo ed elaborato dei lavori del Tennyson, si compone di 130 poesie dedicate alla memoria di Arturo Hallam fidanzato della sorella. Questo poema ebbe una grande influenza sulla generazione passata ed è forse ancora il più letto dei poemi di Tennyson.

FROM 'LOCKSLEY HALL' ¹

In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the
 robin's ² breast;
In the spring the wanton lapwing ³ gets himself
 another crest;
In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd ⁴
 dove
In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to
 thoughts of love.
Then her cheek was pale and thinner than should
 be for one so young,
And her eyes on all my motions with a mute
 observance hung ⁵
And I said, « My cousin Amy, speak, and speak
 the truth to me,
Trust me, cousin, all the current of my being sets
 to thee ».
On her pallid cheek and forehead came a colour
 and a light,

¹ Il 'Castello di Locksley' è una delle più famose poesie del Tennyson. Il poeta canta il suo primo disinganno d'amore e rivisitando i memori luoghi ricorda Amy, l'adorata cugina, che mancando al patto d'amore si arrende alle fredde ragioni della madre e va sposa ad un altro. Tennyson prese l'idea di questa poesia dal *Moallakât*, poesie composte da bardi arabi nel settimo secolo. Tutte queste poesie cominciano infatti con melanconiche riflessioni su abitazioni abbandonate, già ritrovi d'amore e di secreti convegni. Tennyson usa qui una nuova versificazione a distici rimati pieni di passione e di forza che si seguono come onde tumultuose di mare in tempesta.

² Pettiroso.

³ *Lapwing* = *vanellus cristatus*.

⁴ Un iride più viva appare sulla bruna (lett. brunita) colomba.

⁵ I suoi occhi seguivano ogni mio atto con muta attenzione.

As I have seen the rosy red flushing in the northern
night
And she turn'd — her bosom shaken with a sudden
storm of sighs —
All the spirit deeply dawning in the dark of hazel
eyes —
Saying, « I have hid my feelings, fearing they should
do me wrong; »
Saying, « Dost thou love me, cousin? » weeping, « I
have loved thee long ».
Love took up the glass of Time,¹ and turn'd it in
his glowing² hands:
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden
sands.
Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all
the chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self,³ that, trembling, pass'd in
music out of sight.
Many a morning on the moorland did we hear the
copses ring,⁴
And her whisper throng'd my pulses⁵ with the fulness
of the spring.
Many an evening by the waters did we watch the
stately ships,
And our spirits rush'd together at the touching of
the lips.

¹ Clessidra (orologio a polvere).

² Ardenti (di passione).

³ Dell'egoismo, dell'interesse personale.

⁴ I boschetti echeggiare (del cinguettio degli uccelli).

⁵ Faceva pulsare le mie vene.

« COME DOWN, O MAID » ¹(From *The Princess*)

Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height: ²
 What pleasure lives ³ in height (the shepherd sang)
 In height and cold, the splendour of the hills? ⁴
 But cease to move so near the heavens and cease
 To glide a sunbeam ⁵ by the blasted pine,
 To sit a star upon the sparkling spire;
 And come, for Love is of the valley, come thou down,
 And find him; by the happy threshold, ⁶ he,
 Or hand in hand with plenty in the maize, ⁷
 Or red with spirted purple of the vats, ⁸
 Or foxlike in the vine; ⁹ nor cares to walk
 With Death and Morning on the silver horns, ¹⁰
 Nor wilt thou snare him in the white ravine, ¹¹
 Nor find him dropt upon the firths of ice,
 That huddling slant in furrow-cloven falls ¹²

¹ Questo idillio è una delle più belle liriche scritte da Tennyson. È un invito del pastore a una fanciulla dei monti perchè scenda a trovarlo nella valle.

² Alpestre altura.

³ Alberga.

⁴ Tra lo splendore dei (nevosi) colli?

⁵ Guizzar come raggio di sole.

⁶ Egli (l'amore, il tuo innamorato) sta presso il felice casolare.

⁷ O dando la mano all'abbondanza nei campi di granturco.

⁸ *Spirted purple of the vats* = spruzzato sugo (porpora) dei tini; qui il poeta descrive le varie occupazioni del contadino.

⁹ O come volpe a spogliar la vite.

¹⁰ Argentee, candide vette.

¹¹ Ghiacciaie.

¹² Che agglomerandosi scendono in solcate masse.

And through the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge¹ the poppy hangs in sleep.
Why are we weighed upon with heaviness,²
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,³
While all things else have rest from weariness?⁴
All things have rest: why should we toil alone,
We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown!...

Lo!⁵ in the middle of the wood,
The folded leaf is wooed from out the bud⁶
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,
Sun-steeped at noon, and in the moon
Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow
Falls, and floats adown the air.
Lo! sweetened with the summer light,
The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow
Drops in a silent autumn night.
All its allotted length of days,⁷
The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil...

¹ Creste rocciose.

² Affranti dalla fatica.

³ Pungente, crudele angoscia.

⁴ Dopo la fatica hanno riposo.

⁵ Guarda, ecco!

⁶ La foglia ancor piegata è accarezzata (*to woo* = corteggiare, invitare) dai venti che la invitano a sortir dalla gemma.

⁷ Per tutti i suoi giorni (cioè i giorni necessari al fiore per sbocciare e ornarsi di tutta la sua bellezza).

Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?¹
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
In silence; ripen, fall and cease;
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful
[ease.

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
With half-shut eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in a half-dream!...
To hear each other's whispered speech;
Eating the lotos day by day,
To watch the crisping ripples² on the beach,
And tender curving lines of creamy spray;³
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;
To muse and brood and live again in memory,
With those old faces of our infancy,
Heaped over with a mound of grass,
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass

¹ Nel tentar di continuo di superar l'onda che sempre più s'innalza?

² Le piccole onde che si arricciano.

³ Le morbide linee sinuose dello spumeggiante spruzzo.

ST. AGNES' EVE ¹

Deep on the convent-roof the snows
Are sparkling to the moon:
My breath to heaven like vapour goes
May my soul follow soon!
The shadows of the convent-towers
Slant down ² the snowy sward,³
Still creeping with the creeping hours ⁴
That lead me to my Lord.
Make thou my spirit pure and clear
As are the frosty ⁵ skies,
Or this first snowdrop of the year
That in my bosom lies.

As these white robes are soil'd and dark,
To ⁶ yonder shining ground;
As this pale taper's ⁷ earthly sparks
To yonder argent round;
So shows my soul before the Lamb ⁸
My spirit before Thee:

¹ Una monaca nella vigilia del giorno di Sant'Agnese innanzi al grandioso e suggestivo spettacolo di un purissimo cielo lunare che si riflette su di una immensa e solitaria distesa di neve innalza preghiera al Signore perchè l'accoglia presto in cielo.

² Cadono oblique.

³ Prato.

⁴ E si allungano col trascorrere delle ore.

⁵ Gelidi, cristallini.

⁶ Cioè: *compared to*.

⁷ Cero.

⁸ *The Lamb o The Lamb of God* è Gesù.

So in mine earthly house I am
To that I hope to be.
Break up the heaven, o Lord; and far,
Through all yon starlight keen,¹
Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star,
In raiment² white and clean.

He lifts me to the golden doors:
The flashes come and go;
All heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strows³ her lights below,
And deepens on and up! the gates
Roll back, and far within
For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
To make me pure of sin.
The Sabbaths⁴ of Eternity,
One sabbath deep and wide —
A light upon the shining sea —
The Bridegroom with his bride!

¹ Viva luce stellare.

² Veste.

³ Spande.

⁴ *Sabbath* è quasi sinonimo di *Sunday*, ma qui è usato nel senso di *pace, riposo* in contrasto al dolore e alla pena. Con questo significato lo usa anche Pope: *Peaceful sleep out the sabbath of the tomb*'.

« COME NOT, WHEN I AM DEAD »

Come not, when I am dead,
To drop thy foolish tears upon my grave,
To trample round my fallen head,
And vex the unhappy dust thou wouldst not save.
There let the wind sweep and the plover¹ cry;
But thou, go by.

Child, if it were thine error or thy crime
I care no longer, being all unblest:
Wed whom thou wilt, but I am sick of Time,
And I desire to rest.
Pass on, weak heart, and leave me where I lie:
Go by, go by.

¹ Piviere.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

1811-1863

W. M. Thackeray, contemporaneo e rivale di Dickens, nacque nel 1811 a Calcutta, dove suo padre, di buona famiglia della contea di York, era impiegato della East India Company. A sei anni il ragazzo ritornò in Inghilterra e seguì un corso regolare di studi al Trinity College di Cambridge, sebbene non prendesse alcuna laurea. Possedeva una discreta sostanza e non pareva disposto a darsi ad alcuna professione, allorchè, fortunatamente per la sua gloria, perdette quasi ogni suo avere in un fallimento bancario e dovette pensare sul serio a guadagnarsi la vita. Passò qualche tempo a Parigi a studiare la pittura; ma poi lasciò l'arte per il giornalismo, e scrisse per il *Fraser's Magazine* e il *Punch*. Gli articoli che diede a questi periodici sono assai ineguali e di tocco molto incerto, come anche i volumi che seguirono, *The Paris Sketch Book* (1840) e *The Irish Sketch Book* (1843). In *Barry Lyndon* invece, che scrisse dopo avere studiato i capolavori di Fielding e specialmente il *Jonathan Wild*, Thackeray si rivela scrittore di prim'ordine e profondo studioso della natura umana. *Barry Lyndon* è l'autobiografia di uno scapestrato, narrata in un modo così disinvolto e con tanta sincerità e intima compiacenza, ch'egli conquista subito le simpatie del lettore. Il *Book of Snobs* e le *Memoirs of Mr. Yellowplush* segnarono ancora un notevole progresso nell'arte dello scrittore, che doveva trovare la sua più felice espressione in *Vanity Fair* (1846), capolavoro di finissima satira e di profonda analisi psicologica. L'autore narra, in uno stile vivo e pungente, le varie

vicende di Rebecca Sharp, personificazione della scaltrezza femminile, che invano tenta di salire nel mondo con le sue arti abilissime. Attorno alla figura principale molte altre s'aggirano, non meno profondamente tratteggiate e colorite; Amelia Sedley, l'ottimo capitano Dobbin, la famiglia Crawley e quella riuscitissima del Marchese di Steyne, poichè Thackeray, al contrario di Dickens, conosceva intimamente il mondo aristocratico, che a preferenza ama descriverci nei suoi romanzi. Seguendo il piano di *Vanity Fair*, scrisse poi *Pendennis*, storia della vita di Arturo Pendennis, attraentissimo studio di carattere. Possono dirsi quasi proverbiali per i lettori inglesi (come sono per noi i tipi manzoniani di don Abbondio e don Rodrigo) il maggiore Pendennis, tipo di vecchio scapolo, uomo di mondo e egoista quant'altri mai, Miss Blanche Armory, graziosa figurina ultra sentimentale, dipinta con garbata e sottile ironia.

In questo tempo Thackeray si era immerso nello studio della letteratura, dell'arte, dei costumi del secolo XVIII; così preparato, pubblicò nel 1852 un romanzo storico, *Henry Esmond*, uno dei più grandi libri del genere che siano mai stati scritti, rievocazione sicura e viva dei limpidi e freschi giorni della regina Anna. La lingua purissima e forbita dei grandi settecentisti, di Addison, di Pope, di Swift, è mirabilmente imitata, e può dirsi che con questa storia Thackeray diviene lui stesso un classico.

A *Henry Esmond* seguirono *The Virginians*, che ne è la continuazione, e i *Newcomes*, l'ultimo de' suoi grandi libri.

Thackeray fu anche delicato poeta ed elegante scrittore di saggi, che aveva letto come conferenze a Londra (1852) e poi in America, e che furono raccolti in volume col titolo *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*, e ne scrisse altri storici che intitolò *The Four Georges*. Il grande scrittore morì nel 1863 a soli cinquantadue anni, lasciando incompiuto un altro romanzo, *Denis Duval*.

I romanzi di Thackeray sono tra i più fini e originali che siano mai stati scritti, pieni di figure profondamente umane, di una verità e naturalezza meravigliose. Egli ebbe

acuto il senso della ironia della vita; e quindi la nota dominante de' suoi scritti è la satira, talora mordente, ma più spesso bonaria e senza fiele, e sempre unita a un sentimento sincero; perchè egli, sebbene alcuni critici affermino il contrario, non fu un cinico narratore delle miserie e debolezze umane. La prosa di Thackeray è limpida, naturale, piena di grazia signorile, se pur talvolta un po' affrettata; e nei passi più salienti s'innalza a vera e grande bellezza di perfezione artistica.

I AM MADE WELCOME AT WALCOTE

(From 'Henry Esmond' chap. vii)¹

As they came up to the house at Walcote, the windows from within were lighted up with friendly welcome; the supper-table was spread in the oak-parlour; it seemed as if forgiveness and love were awaiting the returning prodigal.

Two or three familiar faces of domestics were on the look-out at the porch — the old housekeeper was there, and young Lockwood from Castlewood in my Lord's livery of tawny and blue. His dear mistress pressed his arm as they passed into the hall. Her eyes beamed out on him with affection indescribable. «Welcome!» was all she said, as she looked up, putting back her fair curls and black hood. A sweet rosy smile blushed on her face; Harry thought he had never seen her look so charming. Her face was lighted with a joy that was brighter than beauty — she took a hand of her son, who was in the hall waiting his mother — she did not quit Esmond's arm.

«Welcome, Harry!» my young lord echoed after her. «Here, we are all come to say so. Here's old Pincot,

¹ *Henry Esmond*, la storia di un colonnello al servizio della regina Anna narrata da lui stesso, è forse il capolavoro di Thackeray; opera d'arte mirabile e studio perfetto della natura umana.

Harry Esmond, rimasto orfano, è preso in casa dai suoi parenti, i Visconti di Castlewood ed entra nella carriera delle armi. Ritorna ora, dopo una brillante campagna, a Walcote ed è festeggiato dalla sua graziosa benefattrice e parente Lady Castlewood e dai cugini Frank e Beatrix, suoi figli.

hasn't she grown handsome? and Pincot, who was older and no handsomer than usual, made a curtsey to the Captain, as she called Esmond, and told my Lord to « Have done, now! »

« And here's Jack Lockwood. He'll make a famous grenadier, Jack; and so shall I; we'll both list¹ under you, Cousin. As soon as I am seventeen, I go to the army — every gentleman goes to the army. Look! who comes here — ho, ho! » he burst into a laugh. « 'Tis Mistress Trix, with a new ribbon; I knew she would put one on as soon as she heard a captain was coming to supper ».

This laughing colloquy took place in the hall of Walcote House: in the midst of which is a staircase that leads from an open gallery, where are the doors of the sleeping chambers: and from one of these, a wax candle in her hand, and illuminating her, came Mistress Beatrix the light falling indeed upon the scarlet ribbon which she wore, and upon the most brilliant white neck in the world.

Esmond had left a child and found a woman, grown beyond the common height; and arrived at such a dazzling completeness of beauty, that his eyes might well show surprise and delight at beholding her. In hers there was a brightness so lustrous and melting, that I have seen a whole assembly follow her as if by an attraction irresistible; and that night the great Duke² was at the playhouse after Ramillies, every soul turned and looked (she chanced to enter at the opposite side of the theatre at the same moment) at her, and not at

¹ Abbreviazione di *enlisten* = arrolarsi.

² The Duke of Malborough, uno dei più grandi capitani inglesi, il vincitore della battaglia di Ramillies contro i francesi.

him. She was a brown beauty; that is, her eyes, hair, and eyebrows, and eyelashes were dark: her hair curling with rich undulations, and waving over her shoulders; but her complexion was as dazzling white as snow in sunshine: except her cheeks, which were a bright red, and her lips, which were of a still deeper crimson. Her mouth and chin, they said, were too large and full, and so they might be for a goddess in marble, but not for a woman whose eyes were fire, whose look was love, whose voice was the sweetest low song, whose shape was perfect symmetry, health, decision, activity, whose foot as it planted itself on the ground was firm but flexible, and whose motion, whether rapid or slow, was always perfect grace — agile as a nymph, lofty as a queen — now melting, now imperious, now sarcastic — there was no single movement of hers but was beautiful. As he thinks of her, he who writes feels young again, and remembers a paragon.

So she came holding her dress with one fair rounded arm, and her taper before her, tripping down the stair to greet Esmond, « She hath put on her scarlet stockings and white shoes », says my Lord, still laughing. « Oh my fine mistress! is this the way you set your cap at the Captain? » She approached, shining smiles upon Esmond, who could look at nothing but her eyes. She advanced holding forward her head, as if she would have him kiss her as he used to do when he was a child. « Stop », she said, « I am grown too big! Welcome, Cousin Harry! » and she made him an arch curtsy, sweeping down to the ground almost, with the most gracious bend, looking up the while with the brightest eyes and sweetest smile. Love seemed to radiate from her. Harry eyed her with such a rapture as the first lover is described as having by Milton.

« N'est-ce pas? » says my Lady, in a low, sweet voice, still hanging on his arm.

Esmond turned round with a start and a blush, as he met his mistress' clear eyes. He had forgotten her, rapt in admiration of the *filia pulcrion*.

« Right foot forward, toe turned out, so; now drop curtsey, and show the red stockings, Trix. They've silver clocks, Harry. The Dowager¹ sent 'em. She went to put 'em on », cries my Lord.

« Hush, you stupid child! » says Miss, smothering her brother with kisses; and then she must come and kiss her mamma, looking all the while at Harry, over his mistress' shoulder. And if she did not kiss him, she gave him both her hands, and then took one of his in both hands, and said, « Oh, Harry we're so glad you're come! » « There are woodcocks for supper », says my Lord. « Huzzay! It was such a hungry Sermon ».

« And it is the 29th of December; and our Harry has come home ».

« Huzzay, old Pincott! » again says my Lord; and my dear lady's lips looked as if they were trembling with a prayer. She would have Harry lead in Beatrix to the supper-room, going herself with my young lord Viscount: and to this party came Tom Tusher directly, whom four at least out of the company of five wished away. Away he went, however, as soon as the sweetmeats were put down, and then, by the great crackling fire, his mistress or Beatrix with her blushing graces, filling his glass for him, Harry told the story of his campaign and passed the most delightful night his life had ever known. The sun was up long ere he was, so deep, sweet,

¹ *The Dowager* è una vecchia parente di Harry.

and refreshing was his slumber. He woke as if angels had been watching at his bed all night. I dare say one that was as pure and loving as an angel had blessed his sleep with her prayers.

AT BRUSSELS ¹

(From 'Vanity Fair' chap. xxviii)

The sight of the very great company of lords and ladies and fashionable persons who thronged the town and appeared in every public place, filled George's ² truly British soul with intense delight. They flung off that happy frigidity and insolence of demeanor which occasionally characterises the great at home, and appearing in numberless public places, condescended to mingle with the rest of the company whom they met there. One night at a party given by the general of the division to which George's regiment belonged, he had the honour of dancing with Lady Blanche Thistlewood, Lord Bareacres' daughter; he bustled for ices and refreshments for the two noble ladies; he pushed and squeezed for Lady Bareacres' carriage; he bragged about the Countess when he got home, in a way which his own father could not have surpassed. He called upon the ladies next day; he rode by their side in the Park; he asked their party to a great dinner at a restaurateur's, and was quite wild with exultation when they agreed to come. Old Bareacres, who had not much pride and a large appetite, would go for a dinner anywhere.

¹ Molte famiglie dell'aristocrazia inglese avevano seguito i loro congiunti a Brussels ove era l'esercito comandato da Wellington.

² George Osborne, figlio di un commerciante, andava superbo di trovarsi tra la società aristocratica.

« I hope there will be no women besides our own party », Lady Bareacres said, after reflecting upon the invitation which had been made, and accepted with too much precipitancy. « Gracious Heaven, Mamma — you don't suppose the man would bring his wife », shrieked Lady Blanche, who had been languishing in George's arms in the newly-imported waltz for hours the night before.

« The men are bearable, but their women — ».

« Wife, just married, dev'lish pretty woman, I hear » the old earl said.

« Well, my dear Blanche », said the mother, « I suppose as Papa wants to go, we must go; but we needn't know them in England, you know ». And so, determined to cut their new acquaintance in Bond Street,¹ these great folks went to eat his dinner at Brussels, and condescending to make him pay for their pleasure, showed their dignity by making his wife uncomfortable, and carefully excluding her from the conversation. This is a species of dignity in which the high-bred British female reigns supreme. To watch the behaviour of a fine lady to other and humbler women is a very good sport for a philosophical frequenter of Vanity Fair.

This festival, on which honest George spent a good deal of money, was the very dismallest of all the entertainments which Amelia had in her honeymoon. She wrote the most piteous account of the feast home to her mamma: how the Countess of Bareacres would not answer when spoken to; how Lady Blanche stared at her with her eye-glass; and what a rage Captain Dobbin² was in at their behaviour; and how my lord as they

¹ Una delle vie più aristocratiche di Londra nel West End.

² Amico e ammiratore di Amelia.

came away from the feast, asked to see the bill, and pronounced it a d — ¹ bad dinner, and d — dear. But though Amelia told all these stories, and wrote home regarding her guest's rudeness, and her own discomfiture old Mrs. Sedley ² was mightily pleased nevertheless, and talked about Emmy's friend, the Countess of Bareacres, with such assiduity that the news how his son was entertaining Peers and Peeresses came to Osborne's ³ ears in the City.

REBECCA IS IN PRESENCE OF THE ENEMY ⁴

(From 'Vanity Fair' chap. III)

If Miss Rebecca Sharp had determined in her heart upon making the conquest of this big beau, I don't think, ladies, we have any right to blame her; for though the task of husband-hunting is generally, and with becoming modesty, entrusted by young persons to their mammas, recollect that Miss Sharp had no kind parent to arrange these delicate matters for her, and that if she did not get a husband for herself, there was no one else in the wide world who would take the trouble off her hands. What causes young people to 'come out' ⁵ but the noble ambition of matrimony?

¹ Cioè *damned*.

² Madre di Amelia.

³ Padre di Giorgio, ricco commerciante della City.

⁴ Rebecca Sharp, una delle creazioni più perfette e famose di Thackeray, nel mondo di «Vanity Fair» personifica la scaltrezza e la perfidia femminile. Rimasta orfana va in un collegio per signorine dove insegna il francese. Ivi stringe amicizia con la buona Amelia Sedley che uscendo di collegio la invita a passar qualche tempo in casa sua. Rebecca tenta subito di conquistare il fratello di lei, Joseph.

⁵ *To come out* = entrare in società.

What sends them trooping to watering-places? What keeps them dancing till five o' clock in the morning through a whole mortal season?¹ What causes them to labour at piano-forte sonatas, and to learn four songs from a fashionable master at a guinea a lesson, and to play the harp if they have handsome arms and neat elbows but that they may bring down some 'desirable' young man with those killing bows and arrows of theirs? What causes respectable parents to take up their carpets, set their houses topsy-turvy,² and spend a fifth of their year's income in ball suppers and iced champagne? Is it sheer love of their species, and an unadulterated wish to see young people happy and dancing? Psha! they want to marry their daughters; and, as honest Mrs. Sedly has, in the depths of her kind heart, already arranged a score of little schemes for the settlement of her Amelia, so also had our beloved but unprotected Rebecca, determined to do her very best to secure the husband, who was even more necessary for her than for her friend. She had a vivid imagination; she had besides read the 'Arabian Nights', and it is a fact that while she was dressing for dinner, and after she had asked Amelia whether her brother was very rich, she had built for herself a most magnificent castle in the air, of which she was mistress, with a husband somewhere in the background (she had not seen him as yet, and his figure would not therefore be very distinct); she had arrayed herself in an infinity of shawls, turbans and diamond necklaces, and had mounted upon an elephant to the sound of the march in Bluebeard, in

¹ Si allude alla *Season* londinese che dura tre mesi, dal maggio al luglio.

² Sottosopra.

order to pay a visit of ceremony to the Gran Mogul. Charming visions! it is the happy privilege of youth to construct you, and many a fanciful young creature besides Rebecca Sharp, has indulged in these delightful daydreams ere now!

Joseph Sedley was twelve years older than his sister Amelia. He was in the East India Company's Civil Service, and his name appeared, at the period of which we write, in the Bengal division of the East India Register, as collector of Boggley Wollah, an honourable and lucrative post, as everybody knows; in order to know to what higher posts Joseph rose in the service, the reader is referred to the same periodical.

Boggley Wollah is situated in a fine, lonely, marshy, jungly ¹ district, famous for snipe-shooting,² and where not unfrequently you may flush a tiger.³ Ramgunge, where there is a magistrate, is only forty miles off, and there is a cavalry station about thirty miles farther; so Joseph wrote home to his parents, when he took possession of his collectorship. He had lived for about eight years of his life, quite alone, at this charming place, scarcely seeing a Christian face, except twice a year, when the detachment arrived to carry off the revenues which he had collected, to Calcutta.

Luckily, at this time he caught a liver complaint, for the cure of which he returned to Europe, and which was the source of great comfort and amusement to him in his native country. He did not live with his family while in London, but had lodgings of his own, like a gay young bachelor. Before he went to India he was

¹ Con grandi boscaglie.

² Caccia alle beccaccine.

³ Scovare, far saltar fuori.

too young to partake of the delightful pleasures of a man about town, and plunged into them on his return, with considerable assiduity. He drove his horses in the Park; he dined at the fashionable taverns, (for the Oriental Club was not as yet invented); he frequented the theatres, as the mode was in those days or made his appearance at the opera, laboriously attired in tights¹ and a cocked hat.²

On returning to India, and ever after, he used to talk of the pleasure of this period of his existence with great enthusiasm, and give you to understand that he and Brummel³ were the leading bucks of the day. But he was as lonely here as in his jungle at Boggley Wollah. He scarcely knew a single soul in the metropolis; and were it not for his doctor and the society of his blue-pills, and his liver complaint he must have died of loneliness. He was lazy, peevish, and a *bon-vivant*; the appearance of a lady frightened him beyond measure; hence it was but seldom that he joined the paternal circle in Russel Square, where there was plenty of gaiety, and where the jokes of his good-natured old father frightened his *amour-propre*. His bulk caused Joseph much anxious thought and alarm; now and then he would make a desperate attempt to get rid of his superabundant fat; but his indolence and love of good living speedily got the better of these endeavours at reform and he found himself again at his three meals a day. He never was well dressed; but he took the hugest pains to adorn his big person, and passed many hours daily in that occupation. His valet made a fortune

¹ Calzoni attillati.

² Cappello a tricornio.

³ Brummel era un famoso zerbinotto.

out of his wardrobe; his toilet-table was covered with as many pomatums and essences as ever were employed by an old beauty: he had tried, in order to give himself a waist,¹ every girth, stay, and waistband then invented. Like most fat men, he *would* have his clothes made too tight, and took care they should be of the most brilliant colours and youthful cut. When dressed at length, in the afternoon, he would issue forth to take a drive with nobody in the Park; and then would come back in order to dress again and go and dine with nobody at the Piazza Coffee-House. He was as vain as a girl; and perhaps his extreme shyness was one of the results of his extreme vanity. If Rebecca can get the better of *him*, and at her first entrance into life, she is a young person of no ordinary cleverness.

GEORGE III ²

(From *The Four Georges*)

King George's household was a model of an English gentleman's household. It was early; it was kindly; it was charitable; it was frugal; it was orderly; it must have been stupid to contemplate. No wonder all the Princes ran away from the lap of that dreary domestic virtue. It always rose, rode, dined at stated intervals. Day after day it was the same. At the same hour at night the King kissed his daughters' jolly cheeks; the Princesses kissed their mother's hand; and Madame Thielke brought the royal night-cap. At the same hour

¹ Farsi una vita sottile.

² Giorgio III salì al trono d'Inghilterra a 22 anni e regnò dal 1760 al 1820. Negli ultimi anni diventò demente.

the equerries and women in waiting had their little dinner and cackled¹ over their tea. The king had his backgammon² or his evening concert; the equerries yawned themselves to death in the anteroom; or the king and his family walked on Windsor slopes, the king holding his darling little Princess Amelia by the hand; and the people crowded round quite good-naturedly; and the Eton boys thrust their chubby cheeks under the crowd's elbows; and the concert over, the king never failed to take his enormous cocked-hat off, and salute his band and say, — Thank you, gentlemen.

A quieter household, a more prosaic life than this of Kew or Windsor cannot be imagined. Rain or shine, the king rode every day for hours; poked his red face into hundreds of cottages round about, and showed that shovel hat³ and Windsor uniform to farmers, to pig-boys, to old women making apple-dumplings,⁴ to all sorts of people, gentle and simple, about whom countless stories are told...

On November 1810 George III ceased to reign. All the world knows the story of his malady: all history presents no sadder figure than that of the old man, blind and deprived of his palace, addressing imaginary parliaments, reviewing fancied troops, holding ghostly courts. I have seen his picture as it was taken at this time, hanging in the apartment of his daughter, the Landgravine of Hesse Homburg — amidst books and Windsor furniture, and a hundred fond reminiscences of her English home. The poor old father is represented

¹ Cicalare.

² Tric-trac (gioco).

³ Spiovente.

⁴ Bodino di mele.

in a purple gown, his snowy beard falling over his breast, the star of his famous Order still idly shining on it. He was not only sightless: he became utterly deaf. All light, all reason, all sound of human voices, all the pleasures of this world of God were taken from him. Some slight lucid moments he had; in one of which the Queen, desiring to see him, entered the room, and found him singing a hymn, and accompanying himself at the harpsichord.

When he had finished he knelt down and prayed aloud for her, and then for his family, and then for the nation, concluding with a prayer for himself, that it might please God to avert his heavy calamity from him, but if not, to give him resignation to submit. He then burst into tears, and his reason again fled.

What preacher need moralise on this story; what words save the simplest are requisite to tell it? It is too terrible for tears. The thought of such a misery smites me down in submission before the ruler of kings and men, the Monarch Supreme over empires and republics, the inscrutable Dispenser of life, death, happiness, victory. 'O brothers' — I said to those who heard me first in America¹ — 'O brothers' speaking the same dear mother-tongue, o comrades! enemies no more,² let us take a mournful hand together as we stand by this Royal corpse, and call a truce to battle! Low he lies to whom the proudest used to kneel once, and who was cast lower than the poorest: dead, whom millions prayed for in vain. Driven off his throne; buffeted by rude

¹ Thackeray, prima di pubblicarli, lesse questi suoi saggi negli Stati Uniti d'America.

² Durante il regno di Giorgio III, dopo una guerra durata sette anni, fu proclamata l'indipendenza delle colonie americane.

hands; with his children in revolt, the darling of his old age killed before him untimely; our Lear hangs over her breathless lips and cries, 'Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little!

'Vex not his ghost — oh! let him pass — he hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer!

Hush! Strife and Quarrel, over the solemn grave!
Sound, trumpets, a mournful march! Fall, dark curtain,
upon his pageant, his pride, his grief, his awful tragedy!

BEATRIX'S NEW SUITOR ¹

(From 'The History of H. Esmond' chap. iv)

The gentleman whom Beatrix had selected was, to be sure, twenty years older than the colonel, with whom she quarrelled for being too old; but this one was but a nameless adventurer, and the other the greatest Duke in Scotland, with pretensions even to a still higher title. My Lord Duke of Hamilton had, indeed, every merit belonging to a gentleman, and he had had the time to mature his accomplishments fully, being upwards of fifty years old when Madam Beatrix selected him for a bridegroom. Duke Hamilton, then Earl of Arran, had been educated at the famous Scottish university of Glasgow, and, coming to London, became a great favourite of Charles the Second, who made him a lord of his bedchamber, and afterwards appointed him Ambassador

¹ Henry Esmond ha desiderato invano la mano della cugina Beatrix che gli preferisce invece il duca di Hamilton, ricco e di illustre casata.

to the French King, under whom the Earl served two campaigns as His Majesty's aide-de-camp; and he was absent on this service when King Charles died.

King James continued my Lord's promotion — made him Master of the Wardrobe and Colonel of the Royal Regiment of Horse; and his Lordship adhered firmly to King James, being of the small company that never quitted that unfortunate monarch till his departure out of England; and then it was, in 1688 namely, that he made the friendship with Colonel Francis Esmond, that had always been, more or less, maintained in the two families.

The Earl professed a great admiration for King William⁴ always, but never could give him his allegiance; and was engaged in more than one of the plots in the late great King's reign which always ended in the plotters' discomfiture, and generally in their pardon, by the magnanimity of the King. Lord Arran was twice prisoner in the tower during this reign, undauntedly, saying, when offered his release, upon parole not to engage against King William, that he would not give his word, because 'he was sure he could not keep it'; but, nevertheless, he was both times discharged without any trial; and the King bore this noble enemy so little malice, that when his mother, the Duchess of Hamilton, of her own right, resigned her claim on her husband's death, the Earl was, by patent signed at Loo, 1690 — created Duke of Hamilton, Marquis of Clydesdale, and Earl of Arran.

His Lordship was a widower, having married, in 1698, Elizabeth, daughter of Digby Lord Gerard, by

⁴ Guglielmo d'Orange, scacciato l'ultimo Stuardo Giacomo II, prese la corona d'Inghilterra.

which marriage great estates came into the Hamilton family; and out of these estates came, in part, the tragic quarrel which ended the Duke's career.¹

From the loss of a tooth to that of a mistress there's no pang that is not bearable. The apprehension is much more cruel than the certainty; and we make up our mind to the misfortune when 'tis irremediable, part with the tormentor, and mumble our crust on t'other side of the jaws. I think Colonel Esmond was relieved when a ducal coach and six came and whisked his charmer away out of his reach, and placed her in a higher sphere. As you have seen the nymph in the opera-machine go up to the clouds at the end of the piece where Mars, Bacchus, Apollo, and all the divine company of Olympians are seated, and quaver out² her last song as a goddess; so when this portentous elevation was accomplished in the Esmond family, I am not sure that every one of us did not treat the divine Beatrix with special honours; at least the saucy little beauty carried her head with a toss of supreme authority, and assumed a touch-me-not air, which all her friends very good-humouredly bowed to.

An old army acquaintance of Colonel Esmond's, honest Tom Trett, who had sold his company,³ married a wife, and turned merchant in the city, was dreadfully gloomy for a long time, though living in a fine house on the river, and carrying on a great trade to all appearance. At length Esmond saw his friend's name in the *Gazette* as a bankrupt; and a week after this cir-

¹ Il duca fu ucciso, per questioni d'interesse, in un duello con Lord Mohun.

² *Quaver out* = cantare facendo tremolare la voce.

³ Cioè il suo grado nell'esercito.

cumstance my bankrupt walks into Mr. Esmond's lodging with a face perfectly radiant with good-humour, and as jolly and careless as when they had sailed from Southampton ten years before for Vigo. 'This bankruptcy' says Tom, 'has been hanging over my head these three years; the thought hath prevented my sleeping, and I have looked at poor Polly's head on t'other pillow, and then towards my razor on the table, and thought to put an end to myself, and so give my woes the slip. But now we are bankrupts; Tom Trett pays as many shillings in the pound as he can; his wife has a little cottage at Fulham, and her fortune secured to herself. I am afraid neither of bailiff nor of creditor; and for the last six nights have slept easy. So it was that when Fortune shook her wings and left him, honest Tom cuddled¹ himself up in his ragged virtue, and fell asleep.

Esmond did not tell his friend how much his story applied to Esmond too; but he laughed at it and used it; and having fairly struck his docket² in this love transaction, determined to put a cheerful face on his bankruptcy. Perhaps Beatrix was a little offended at his gaiety. 'Is this the way, sir, that you receive the announcement of your misfortune?' says she, and do you come smiling before me as if you were glad to be rid of me?'

Esmond would not be put off from his good humour, but told her the story of Tom Trett and his bankruptcy. 'I have been hankering after the grapes on the wall' says he, 'and lost my temper because they were beyond my reach; was there any wonder? They're gone now,

¹ *To cuddle* = accomodarsi, appollaiarsi.

² *Docket* = cartello; qui vuol dire fare il saldo, finirla.

and another has them — a taller man than your humble servant has won them¹. And the Colonel made his cousin a low bow.

‘A taller man, Cousin Esmond!’ says she.

‘A man of spirit would have scaled the wall, sir, and seized them! A man of courage would have fought for ’em, not gaped for ’em’.

‘A duke has but to gape and they drop into his mouth’ says Esmond with another low bow.

‘Yes, sir;’ says she, ‘a Duke *is* a taller man than you. And why should I not be grateful to one such as his Grace, who gives me his heart and his great name? It is a great gift he honours me with; I know ’tis a bargain between us; and I accept it, and will do my utmost to perform my part of it. ’Tis no question of sighing and philandering¹ between a nobleman of his Grace’s age and a girl who hath little of that softness in her nature. Why should I not own that I am ambitious, Harry Esmond; and if it be no sin in a man to covet honour, why should a woman too not desire it? Shall I be frank with you, Harry, and say that if you had not been down on your knees, and so humble, you might have fared better with me? A woman of my spirit, Cousin, is to be won by gallantry, and not by sighs and rueful faces. All the time you are worshipping and singing hymns to me, I know very well I am no goddess, and grow weary of the incense. So would you have been weary of the goddess too — when she was called Mrs. Esmond, and got out of humour because she had not pin-money enough, and was forced to go about in an old gown. Eh! Cousin, a goddess in a mob-cap,²

¹ *To philander* = fare all’amore.

² *Mob-cap* = specie di cuffia legata con nastri sotto il mento.

that has to make her husband's gruel,¹ ceases to be divine — I am sure of it. I should have been sulky and scolded; and of all the proud wretches in the world, Mr. Esmond is the proudest, let me tell him that. You never fall into a passion; but you never forgive, I think. Had you been a great man, you might have been good-humoured; but being nobody, sir, you are too great a man for me; and I'm afraid of you, Cousin — there! and I won't worship you, and you'll never be happy except with a woman who will. Why, after I belonged to you, and after one of my tantrums,² you would have put the pillow over my head some night, and smothered me, as the black man does the woman in the play that you are so fond of. What's the creature's name? — Desdemona. You would, you little black-dyed Othello?' —

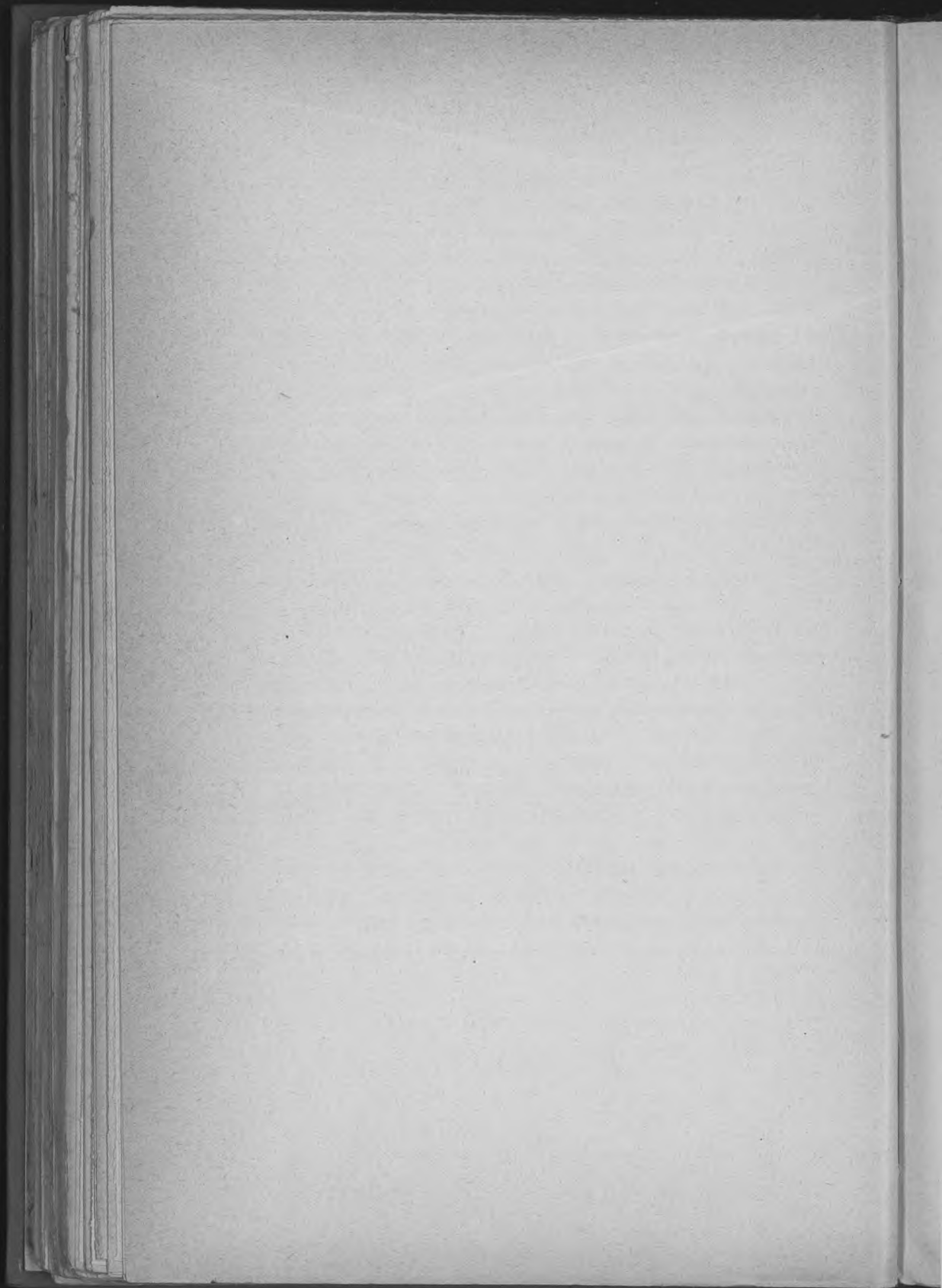
'I think I should, Beatrix,' says the Colonel.

'And I want no such ending. I intend to live to be a hundred, and to go to ten thousand routs and balls, and to play cards every night of my life till the year eighteen hundred. And I like to be the first of my company, sir; and I like flattery and compliments, and you give me none; and I like to be made to laugh, sir, and who's to laugh at *your* dismal face, I should like to know? and I like a coach-and-six or a coach-and-eight; and I like diamonds, and a new gown every week; and people to say, 'That's the Duchess. How well her Grace looks! Make way for Madame l'Ambasadrice d'Angleterre. Call her Excellency's people' — that's what I like. And as for you, you want a woman to bring your slippers and cap, and to sit at your feet,

¹ *Gruel* = minestra fatta di fior di farina o avena cotta nell'acqua o latte.

² *Tantrums* = capricci, bizzze.

and cry, 'O caro! O bravo! whilst you read your Shakespeares and Miltons and stuff. Mamma would have been the wife for you, had you been a little older, though you look ten years older than she does — you do, you glum-faced, blue-bearded little old man! you might have sat, and billed and cooed like a pair of old pigeons on a perch; I want my wings, and to use them, sir. And she spread out her beautiful arms, as if indeed she could fly off like the pretty 'Gawrie' whom the man in the story was enamoured of.



CARLOTTA BRONTË

1816-1855

Carlotta Brontë, figlia maggiore di un povero parroco del Yorkshire, oriundo irlandese, nacque nell'aprile del 1816. Ancora in giovane età rimase senza la madre e fu mandata, insieme con quattro sorelle, in un asilo di beneficenza per le figlie dei parroci bisognosi, a Cowan's Bridge. Nel collegio, a causa del cattivo nutrimento e del numero esuberante di bambine, scoppiò una mortale epidemia di cui restarono vittime due sorelle di Carlotta. Nell'inverno, insieme con le due sorelle superstiti, Emilia e Anna, abbandonò la misera scuola, il *Lowood* giustamente sferzato nel romanzo *Jane Eyre*, e si ritirò a Haworth col padre. Le tre ragazze, abbandonate a loro stesse, condussero una strana vita di sogno, divertendosi a scrivere storie e racconti, dei quali il famoso duca di Wellington era sempre l'eroe. Carlotta andò ancora a scuola a Roehead, restandoci un anno; ci tornò quattro anni dopo, nel 1835, come maestra, finchè non andò in un'altra scuola a Bruxelles per imparare il francese e il tedesco, che dovevano servirle per trovare un posto di governante. Ritornata in patria scrisse insieme con le sorelle un volumetto di versi, pubblicati sotto gli pseudonimi di *Currer*, *Ellis* e *Acton Bell*, che conservavano le iniziali dei loro nomi. Non avendo incontrato molto favore come poetesse, si volsero al romanzo, e scrissero: Carlotta, *The Professor*, Emilia, *Wuthering Heights* e Anna, *Agnes Grey*. Il primo di questi romanzi non fu accettato dagli editori, ma Carlotta non perdette animo, e nello stesso anno scrisse *Jane Eyre*, che, subito pubblicato, fu accolto con straordinario

favore. L'aveva aiutata a trovarsi un'editore il Thackeray, divinando, quasi, l'ingegno della Carlotta e la futura nuova gloria della letteratura inglese. Ogni carattere e ogni incidente di questo libro è tratto dalla vita reale, dalla vita vissuta dalla scrittrice, che s'adombra sotto il nome dell'eroina. Due anni dopo Emilia ed Anna morirono, e solo Carlotta potè continuare l'opera intrapresa, sebbene per breve tempo: scrisse *Shirley* (1849) e *Villette* (1852), e morì nel 1855, dopo appena un anno di matrimonio col Rev. Nicholls.

La più illustre delle tre sorelle è Carlotta, sebbene anche Emilia sia scrittrice di molto ingegno, come attesta il suo tragico romanzo *Wuthering Heights*. Carlotta Brontë fu la prima a darci romanzi di vita familiare, mirabili per l'impeto e la sincerità con cui sono scritti, per la nota tragica e selvaggia, per la straordinaria potenza dell'autrice nell'analizzare e svelare il cuore femminile, che fino allora era rimasto pagina chiusa per il lettore inglese.

JANE AND HER COUSINS

(From '*Jane Eyre*' chap. 1)

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of the question.

I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mamma in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me she had dispensed from joining the group, saying she regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance: but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner — something lighter, franker, more natural as it were — she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children.

What does Bessie say I have done? I asked.

« Jane, I don't like cavillers or questioners: besides there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent ».

A small breakfast-room adjoined the drawing-room. I slipped in there. It contained a book-case; I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures. I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined in a double retirement.

Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass protecting but not separating me from the drear November day. At intervals, while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beaten shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.

I returned to my book — Bewick's History of British Birds: the letterpress thereof I cared little for, generally speaking: and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank. They were those which treat of the haunts of sea-fowl; « of the solitary rocks and promontories » by them only inhabited; of the coast of Norway, studded with isles from its southern extremity, the Lindeness, or Naze, to the North cape, —

« Where the Northern Ocean, in vast whirls,
Boils round the naked, melancholy isles
Of farthest Thule; and the Atlantic surge
Pours in among the stormy Hebrides ».

Nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland, with « the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone, and those forlorn regions of dreary space, — that reservoir of frost and snow, where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters, glazed in Alpine heights above heights, surround the pole, and concentrate the multiplied rigours of extreme cold ». Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive. The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking. I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quite solitary churchyard, with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two trees, its low horizon girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide. The two ships becalmed on a torbid sea I believed to be marine phantoms. The fiend pinning down the thief's pack behind him I passed over quickly; it was an object of terror.

So was the black-horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows.

Each picture told a story: mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting: as interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings, when she chanced to be in good humour; and when having brought her ironing-table to the nursery hearth, she allowed us to sit about it, and while she got up Mrs. Reed's lacefrills, and crimped her nightcap borders,

fed our eager attention with passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and older ballads; or (as at a later period I discovered) from the pages of « Pamela » and « Henry, Earl of Moreland ». With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy at least in my way. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon. The breakfast-room door opened.

« Boh! Madam Mope! » cried the voice of John Reed; then he paused; he found the room apparently empty.

« Where the dickens is she? » he continued. « Lizzy! Georgy! (calling to his sisters) Joan is not here: tell mamma she is run out into the rain — bad animal! »

« It is well I drew the curtain », thought I; and I wished fervently he might not discover my hiding place; nor would John Reed have found it out himself — he was not quick either of vision or conception — but Eliza just put her head in at the door, and said at once, —

« She is in the window-seat, to be sure, Jack ».

And I came out immediately, for I trembled at the idea of being dragged forth by the said Jack.

« What do you want? » I asked with awkward diffidence.

« Say, 'What do you want, Master Reed?', was the answer. « I want you to come here: » and seating himself in an arm-chair, he intimated by a gesture that I was to approach and stand before him.

John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old — four years older than I, for I was but ten; large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious, and gave him and dim a bleared eye and flabby cheeks. He ought now to have been at school, but his mamma had taken him home for a month

or two, «on account of his delicate health». Mr. Miles, the master, affirmed that he would do very well if he had fewer cakes and sweetmeats sent him from home; but the mother's heart turned from an opinion so harsh, and inclined rather to the more refined idea that John's sallowness was owing to over application, and, perhaps, to pining after home. John had not much affection for his mother and sisters, and an antipathy to me. He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. There were moments when I was bewildered by the terror he inspired, because I had no appeal whatever against either his menaces or his inflictions; the servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my part against him and Mrs. Reed was blind and deaf on the subject; she never saw him strike or heard him abuse me, though he did both now and then in her very presence, more frequently, however, behind her back.

Habitually obedient to John, I came up to his chair. He spent some three minutes in thrusting out his tongue at me as far as he could without damaging the roots: I knew he would soon strike, and while dreading the blow, I mused on the disgusting and ugly appearance of him who would presently deal it. I wonder if he read that notion in my face; for, all at once, without speaking, he struck suddenly and strongly. I tottered, and on regaining my equilibrium retired back a step or two from his chair.

That is for your impudence in answering mamma awhile since», said he, «and for your sneaking way of getting behind curtains, and for the look you had in your eyes two minutes since, you rat!»

Accustomed to John Reed's abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult.

« What were you doing behind the curtain? » he asked.

« I was reading ».

« Show the book ».

I returned to the window and fetched it thence.

« You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows ».

I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded.

« Wicked and cruel boy! » I said. « You are like a murderer — you are like a slave-driver — you are like the Roman emperors! »

I had read Goldsmith's *History of Rome* and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligola, etc. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud.

« What! what! » he cried. « Did she say that to me? Did you hear her, Eliza and Georgiana? Won't I tell mamma? but first — ».

He ran headlong at me: I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing.

I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don't very well know what I did with my hands, but he called me « Rat, rat! » and bellowed out aloud. Aid was near him: Eliza and Georgiana had run for Mrs. Reed, who was gone upstairs; she now came upon the scene followed by Bessie and her maid Abbot. We were parted: I heard the words, — « Dear! dear! What a fury to fly at Master John! »

« Did ever anybody see such a picture of passion! »

Then Mrs. Reed subjoined, —

« Take her away to the red-room, and lock her in there ».

Four hands were immediately laid upon me, and I was borne upstairs.

THORNFIELD ¹

(From « *Jane Eyre* » chap. xi)

When Mrs. Fairfax had bidden me a kind good night, and I had fastened my door, gazed leisurely round, and in some measure effaced the eerie ² impression made by that wide hall, that dark and spacious staircase, and

¹ Jane Eyre, l'eroina del romanzo, ha lasciato la scuola di Lowood, dove era maestra, ed è arrivata a Thornfield presso una famiglia in qualità d'istitutrice.

² *Eerie* = che da un senso di paura, pauroso.

that long, cold gallery, by the livelier aspect of my little room, I remembered that, after a day of bodily fatigue and mental anxiety, I was now in safe haven. The impulse of gratitude swelled my heart, and I knelt down at the bedside and offered up thanks where thanks were due; not forgetting ere I rose, to implore aid on my further path, and the power of meriting the kindness which seemed so frankly offered me before it was earned.

My couch had no thorns in it that night; my solitary room no fears. At once weary and content, I slept soon and soundly: when I awoke it was broad day.

The chamber looked such a bright little place to me as the sun shone in between the gay blue chintz window curtains, showing papered walls and a carpeted floor, so unlike the bare planks and stained plaster of Lowood,⁴ that my spirits rose at the view.

Externals have a great effect on the young: I thought that a fairer era of life was beginning for me — one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils. My faculties, roused by the change of scene, the new field offered to hope, seemed all astir. I cannot precisely define what they expected, but it was something pleasant — not perhaps that day or that month, but at an indefinite future period.

I rose; I dressed myself with care: obliged to be plain — for I had no article of attire that was not made with extreme simplicity — I was still by nature solicitous to be neat. It was not my habit to be disregarding of appearance or careless of the impression I made: on the contrary, I ever wished to look as well as I could, and to please as much as my want of beauty would permit. I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer;

⁴ La scuola da dove veniva Jane.

I sometimes wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and small cherry mouth; I desired to be tall, stately, and finely developed in figure; I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked. And why had I these aspirations and these regrets? It would be difficult to say: I could not then distinctly say it to myself; yet I had a reason, and a logical, natural reason too. However, when I had brushed my hair very smooth, and put on my black frock — which, Quakerlike as it was, at least had the merit of fitting to a nicety — and adjusted my clean white tucker,¹ I thought I should do respectably enough to appear before Mrs. Fairfax, and that my new pupil would not at least recoil from me with antipathy.

Having opened my chamber window, and seen that I left all things straight and neat on the toilet table, I ventured forth.

Traversing the long and matted² gallery, I descended the slippery steps of oak; then I gained the hall. I halted there a minute; I looked at some pictures on the walls (one, I remember, represented a grim man in a cuirass, and one a lady with powdered hair and a pearl necklace), at a bronze lamp pendent from the ceiling, at a great clock whose case was of oak curiously carved, and ebon black with time and rubbing. Everything appeared very stately and imposing to me; but then I was so little accustomed to grandeur. The hall door, which was half of glass, stood open; I stepped over the threshold. It was a fine autumn morning; the early sun shone serenely on embrowned groves and still green fields. Advancing

¹ Specie di collare di tela bianca ora passato di moda.

² Coperta di stuoie.

on to the lawn, I looked up and surveyed the front of the mansion. It was three stories high, of proportions not vast, though considerable: a gentleman's manor-house, not a nobleman's seat: battlements round the top gave it a picturesque look. Its gray front stood out well from the background of a rookery, whose cawing tenants were now on the wing: they flew over the lawn and grounds to alight in a great meadow, from which these were separated by a sunk fence, and where an array of mighty old thorn trees, strong, knotty, and broad as oaks, at once explained the etymology of the mansion's designation. Farther off were hills: not so lofty as those round Lowood, nor so craggy, nor so like barriers of separation from the living world; but yet quiet and lonely hills enough, and seeming to embrace Thornfield with a seclusion I had not expected to find existent so near the stirring locality of Millcote. A little hamlet, whose roofs were blent with trees, straggled¹ up the side of one of these hills; the church of the district stood nearer Thornfield: its old tower-top looked over a knoll² between the house and gates.

¹ Era sparso.

² Poggio.

GEORGE ELIOT

1819-1880

Marion Evans, figlia di un ricco fattore, famosa sotto lo pseudonimo di Giorgio Eliot, nacque a Arbury nel Warwickshire nel novembre del 1819. Passò la fanciullezza in campagna, e a tredici anni andò a scuola a Coventry; richiamata in famiglia per la morte della madre, seguì i suoi studi da sè, leggendo molto, imparando l'italiano e il tedesco mentre accudiva alle faccende domestiche. Nel 1849 perdette il padre: viaggiò allora sul continente insieme con alcuni amici; e, tornata in patria, essendosi già fatta notare per alcuni articoli, le fu offerto un posto nella direzione della *Westminster Review*. Ebbe così occasione di conoscere alcuni tra i più autorevoli letterati, tra i quali George Henry Lewes, brillante giornalista e ottimo critico, che, intuendo il genio di lei, la indusse a tentare il romanzo. E nel 1856 Giorgio Eliot, che ormai contava trentasette anni, pubblicò *Amos Barton*, il primo di una serie di brevi racconti che apparvero sul *Blackwood's Magazine* e che furono poi riuniti sotto il titolo di *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Il volume, pieno di reminiscenze de' suoi anni di fanciullezza, mostra una potente osservazione dei fatti della vita familiare pari a quella di Jane Austin, unita però ad una forte vena tragica ed emotiva, che mancava a quell'artista finissimo. Il libro, scritto in uno stile delicato e spigliato, ebbe favorevole accoglienza, e destò anche un certo rumore, poichè fu facile ravvisare alcuni dei personaggi dalla scrittrice troppo chiaramente adombrati. Seguì nel 1850 *Adam Bede*, fedele espressione della vita rustica inglese di quel tempo; *The Mill on the Floss*, il più attraente e popolare

de' suoi romanzi, che rivela grande la sua potenza nell'analizzare il cuore umano, come nell'aspro conflitto tra l'amore e il dovere che si combatte nell'animo di Maggie la bella eroina del libro; e il breve racconto idillico di *Silas Marner*. Su questi quattro volumi posa sicura la fama della Eliot. Nei romanzi che scrisse dipoi, quali *Romola*, racconto storico dei tempi del Savonarola, opera di erudizione costruita con paziente lavoro, *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch* (1871) e *Daniel Deronda*, commise l'errore di abbandonare il romanzo semplice di vita familiare, tessuto sullo sfondo del paesetto campestre ch'ella conosceva così intimamente, per scriver romanzi eruditi, appesantiti da lunghe dissertazioni morali e filosofiche, e mancanti di verità organica, d'invenzione, di vita; che, se piacquero ed entusiasmarono i lettori del suo tempo, oggidi offuscano alquanto la fama, altrimenti sempre viva e luminosa, della grande scrittrice.

Morì a Chelsea nel dicembre del 1880, dopo solo due anni di matrimonio con J. Walter Cross.

OUTSIDE DORLCOTE MILL

(From '*The Mill on the Floss*' chap. 1)

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships — laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal — are borne along to the town of St. Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted¹ red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. Far away on each hand stretch the rich pastures, and the patches of dark earth, made ready for the seed of broad-leaved green crops, or touched already with the tint of the tender-bladed² autumn-sown corn. There is a remnant still of the last year's golden clusters of beehive ricks³ rising at intervals beyond the hedgerows; and everywhere the hedgerows are studded with trees: the distant ships seem to be lifting their masts and stretching their red-brown sails close among the branches of the spreading ash. Just by the red-roofed town the tributary Ripple flows with a lively current into the Floss. How lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wave-lets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low placid

¹ Con le tegole scanalate.

² Blade = filo d'erba.

³ Rick = mucchio, beehive ricks = bugne d'alveare.

voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving. I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge.

And this is Dorlcote Mill. I must stand a minute or two here on the bridge and look at it, though the clouds are threatening, and it is far on in the afternoon. Even in this leafless time of departing February it is pleasant to look at — perhaps the chill damp season adds a charm to the trimly-kept, comfortable dwelling-house, as old as the elms and chestnuts that shelter it from the northern blast. The stream is brimful now, and lies high in this little withy plantation,¹ and half drowns the grassy fringe of the croft² in front of the house. As I look at the full stream, the vivid grass, the delicate bright-green powder softening the outline of the great trunks and branches that gleam from under the bare purple boughs, I am in love with moistness, and envy the white ducks that are dipping their heads far into the water here among the withes, unmindful of the awkward appearance they make in the drier world above.

The rush of the water, and the booming of the mill, bring a dreamy deafness, which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene. They are like a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond. And now there is the thunder of the huge covered waggon coming home with sacks of grain. That honest waggoner is thinking of his dinner, getting sadly dry in the oven at this late hour; but he will not touch it till he has fed his horses, — the strong, submissive, meek-eyed beasts, who, I fancy, are looking mild reproach at him

¹ Piantagione di vimini, salici.

² Praticello.

from between their blinkers,¹ that he should crack his whip at them in that awful manner, as if they needed that hint! See how they stretch their shoulders up the slope towards the bridge, with all the more energy because they are so near home. Look at their grand shaggy feet that seem to grasp the firm earth, at the patient strength of their necks bowed under the heavy collar, at the mighty muscles of their struggling haunches! I should like well to hear them neigh over their hardly-earned feed of corn, and see them, with their moist necks freed from the harness, dipping their eager nostrils into the muddy pond. Now they are on the bridge, and down they go again at a swifter pace, and the arch of the covered waggon disappears at the turning behind the trees.

Now I can turn my eyes towards the mill again, and watch the unresting wheel sending out its diamond jets of water. That little girl is watching it too: she has been standing on just the same spot at the edge of the water ever since I paused on the bridge. And that queer white cur with the brown ear seems to be leaping and barking in ineffectual remonstrance with the wheel; perhaps he is jealous, because his playfellow in the beaver bonnet is so rapt in its movement. It is time the little playfellow went in, I think; and there is a very bright fire to tempt her: the red light shines out under the deepening grey of the sky. It is time, too, for me to leave off resting my arms on the cold stone of this bridge...

¹ Visiera.

THE FLOOD

(From '*The Mill on the Floss*' chap. v)

At that moment Maggie felt a startling sensation of sudden cold about her knees and feet: it was water flowing under her. She started up: the stream was flowing under the door that led into the passage. She was not bewildered for an instant — she knew it was the flood! The tumult of emotion she had been enduring for the last twelve hours seemed to have left a great calm in her: without screaming, she hurried with the candle upstairs to Bob Jakin's bedroom. The door was ajar;¹ she went in and shook him by the shoulder. — Bob, the flood is come! it is in the house! let us see if we can make the boats safe.

She lighted his candle, while the poor wife, snatching up her baby, burst into screams; and then she hurried down again to see if the waters were rising fast. There was a step down into the room at the door leading from the staircase: she saw that the water was already on a level with the step. While she was looking, something came with a tremendous crash against the window, and sent the leaded panes and the old wooden framework inwards in shivers, — the water pouring in after it.

« It is the boat! » cried Maggie. « Bob, come down to get the boats! ».

And without a moment's shudder of fear, she plunged through the water, which was rising fast to her knees, and by the glimmering light of the candle she had left on the stairs, she mounted on the window-sill, and crept

¹ Socchiusa.

into the boat, which was left with the prow lodging and protruding through the window. Bob was not long after her, hurrying without shoes or stockings, but with the lanthorn in his hand. — Why, they're both here — both the boats — said Bob, as he got into the one where Maggie was. — It's wonderful this fastening isn't broke too, as well as the mooring.

In the excitement of getting into the other boat, unfastening it and mastering an oar, Bob was not struck with the danger Maggie incurred. We are not apt to fear for the fearless, when we are companions in their danger, and Bob's mind was absorbed in possible expedients for the safety of the helpless in-doors. The fact that Maggie had been up, had waked him, and had taken the lead in activity, gave Bob a vague impression of her as one who would help to protect, not need to be protected. She too had got possession of an oar, and had pushed off, so as to release the boat from the overhanging window-frame. — The water's rising so fast — said Bob — I doubt it'll be in at the chambers before long — th'house is so low. I've more mind to get Prissy and the child and the mother into the boat, if I could, and trusten to the water — for th'old house is none so safe. And if I let go the boat... but you, — he exclaimed, suddenly lifting the light of his lanthorn on Maggie, as she stood in the rain with the oar in her hand and her black hair streaming.

Maggie had no time to answer, for a new tidal current swept along the line of the houses, and drove both the boats out on to the wide water, with a force that carried them far past the meeting current of the river.

In the first moments Maggie felt nothing, thought of nothing, but that she had suddenly passed away from

that life which she had been dreading: it was the transition of death, without its agony — and she was alone in the darkness with God.

The whole thing had been so rapid — so dream-like — that the threads of ordinary association were broken: she sank down on the seat clutching the oar mechanically, and for a long while had no distinct conception of her position. The first thing that waked her to fuller consciousness, was the cessation of the rain, and a perception that the darkness was divided by the faintest light, which parted the overhanging gloom from the immeasurable watery level below. She was driven out upon the flood: — that awful visitation of God which her father used to talk of — which had made the nightmare of her childish dreams. And with that thought there rushed in the vision of the old home — and Tom — and her mother — they had all listened together. — O God, where am I? Which is the way home? — She cried out, in the dim loneliness.

What was happening to them at the Mill? The flood had once nearly destroyed it. They might be in danger — in distress; her mother and her brother, alone, there, beyond reach of help! Her whole soul was strained now on that thought; and she saw the long-loved faces looking for help into the darkness, and finding none. She was floating in smooth water now — perhaps far on the over-flooded fields. There was no sense of present danger to check the outgoing of her mind to the old home; and she strained her eyes against the curtain of gloom that she might seize the first sight of her whereabouts — that she might catch some faint suggestion of the spot towards which all her anxieties tended.

O how welcome, the widening of that dismal watery level — the gradual uplifting of the cloudy firmament —

the slowly defining blackness of objects above the glassy dark! Yes — she must be out on the fields — those were the tops of hedgerow trees. Which way did the river lie? Looking behind her, she saw the lines of black trees: looking before her there were none: then the river lay before her. She seized an oar and began to paddle¹ the boat forward with the energy of wakening hope: the dawning seemed to advance more swiftly, now she was in action; and she could soon see the poor dumb beasts crowding piteously on a mound² where they had taken refuge. Onward she paddled and rowed by turns in the growing twilight: her wet clothes clung round her, and her streaming hair was dashed about by the wind, but she was hardly conscious of any bodily sensations — except a sensation of strength, inspired by mighty emotion. Along with the sense of danger and possible rescue for those long remembered beings at the old home, there was an undefined sense of reconciliation with her brother: what quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity, when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone, and we are all one with each other in primitive mortal needs? Vaguely, Maggie felt this; — in the strong resurgent love towards her brother that swept away all the later impressions of hard, cruel offence and misunderstanding, and left only the deep, underlying, unshakable memories of early union.

But now there was a large dark mass in the distance, and near to her Maggie could discern the current of the river. The dark mass must be — yet, it was — St. Ogg's. Ah, now she knew which way to look for

¹ Far avanzare la barca puntando il remo sul fondo.

² Poggio.

the first glimpse of the well-known trees — the grey willows, the now yellowing chestnuts — and above them the old roof! But there was no colour, no shape yet: all was faint and dim. More and more strongly the energies seemed to come and put themselves forth, as if her life were a stored-up force that was being spent in this hour, unneeded for any future. She must get her boat into the current of the Floss, else she would never be able to pass the Ripple, and approach the house: this was the thought that occurred to her, as she imagined with more and more vividness the state of things round the old home. But then she might be carried very far down, and be unable to guide her boat out of the current again. For the first time distinct ideas of danger began to press upon her; but there was no choice of courses, no room for hesitation, and she floated into the current. Swiftly she went now, without effort; more and more clearly in the lessening distance and the growing light she began to discern the objects that she knew must be the well-known trees and roofs; nay she was not far off a rushing muddy current that must be the strangely altered Ripple.

Great God! there were floating masses in it, that might dash against her boat as she passed, and cause her to perish too soon. What were those masses?

For the first time Maggie's heart began to beat in an agony of dread. She sat helpless — dimly conscious that she was being floated along — more intensely conscious of the anticipated clash. But the horror was transient: it passed away before the on-coming warehouses of St. Ogg's: she had passed the mouth of the Ripple, then: *now*, she must use all her skill and power to manage the boat and get it if possible out of the current. She could see now that the bridge was broken down:

she could see the masts of a stranded vessel far out over the watery field. But no boats were to be seen moving on the river — such as had been laid hands on were employed in the flooded streets. With new resolution, Maggie seized her oar, and stood up again to paddle; but the now ebbing tide added to the swiftness of the river, and she was carried along beyond the bridge. She could hear shouts from the windows overlooking the river, as if the people there were calling to her. It was not till she had passed on nearly to Tofton that she could get the boat clear of the current. Then with one yearning look towards her uncle Deane's house that lay farther down the river, she took to both her oars and rowed with all her might across the watery fields, back towards the mill. Colour was beginning to awake now, and as she approached the Dorlcote fields, she could discern the tints of the trees — could see the old Scotch firs far to the right, and the home chestnuts — oh! how deep they lay in the water: deeper than the trees on this side of the hill. And the roof of the Mill — where was it? Those heavy fragments hurrying down the Ripple — what had they meant? But it was not the house — the house stood firm: drowned up to the first story, but still firm — or was it broken in at the end towards the Mill?

With panting joy that she was there at last — joy that overcame all distress, Maggie neared the front of the house. At first she heard no sound: she saw no object moving. Her boat was on a level with the upstairs windows. She called out in a loud piercing voice.

— Tom, where are you? Mother, where are you? Here is Maggie! —

Soon, from the window of the attic in the central gable, she heard Tom's voice:

— Who is it? Have you brought a boat?

— It is I, Tom, — Maggie. Where is mother?

— She is not here: she went to Garum, the day before yesterday. I'll come down to the lower window.

— Alone, Maggie? said Tom, in a voice of deep astonishment, as he opened the middle window on a level with the boat.

— Yes, Tom: God has taken care of me, to bring me to you. Get in quickly. Is there no one else?

— No, said Tom, stepping into the boat — I fear the man is drowned: he was carried down the Ripple, I think, when part of the Mill fell with the crash of trees and stones against it: I've shouted again and again, and there has been no answer. Give me the oars, Maggie.

It was not till Tom had pushed off and they were on the wide water — he face to face with Maggie — that the full meaning of what had happened rushed upon his mind. It came with so overpowering a force — it was such a new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear — that he was unable to ask a question. They sat mutely gazing at each other: Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face — Tom pale with a certain awe and humiliation. Thought was busy though the lips were silent: and though he could ask no question, he guessed a story of almost miraculous divinely protected effort. But at last a mist gathered over the blue-grey eyes, and the lips found a word they could utter: the old childish — Magsie!

Maggie could make no answer but a long deep sob of that mysterious wondrous happiness that is one with pain. As soon as she could speak, she said — We will go to Lucy, Tom: we'll go and see if she is safe, and then we can help the rest.

Tom rowed with untired vigour, and with a different speed from poor Maggie's. The boat was soon in the current of the river again, and soon they would be at Tofton.

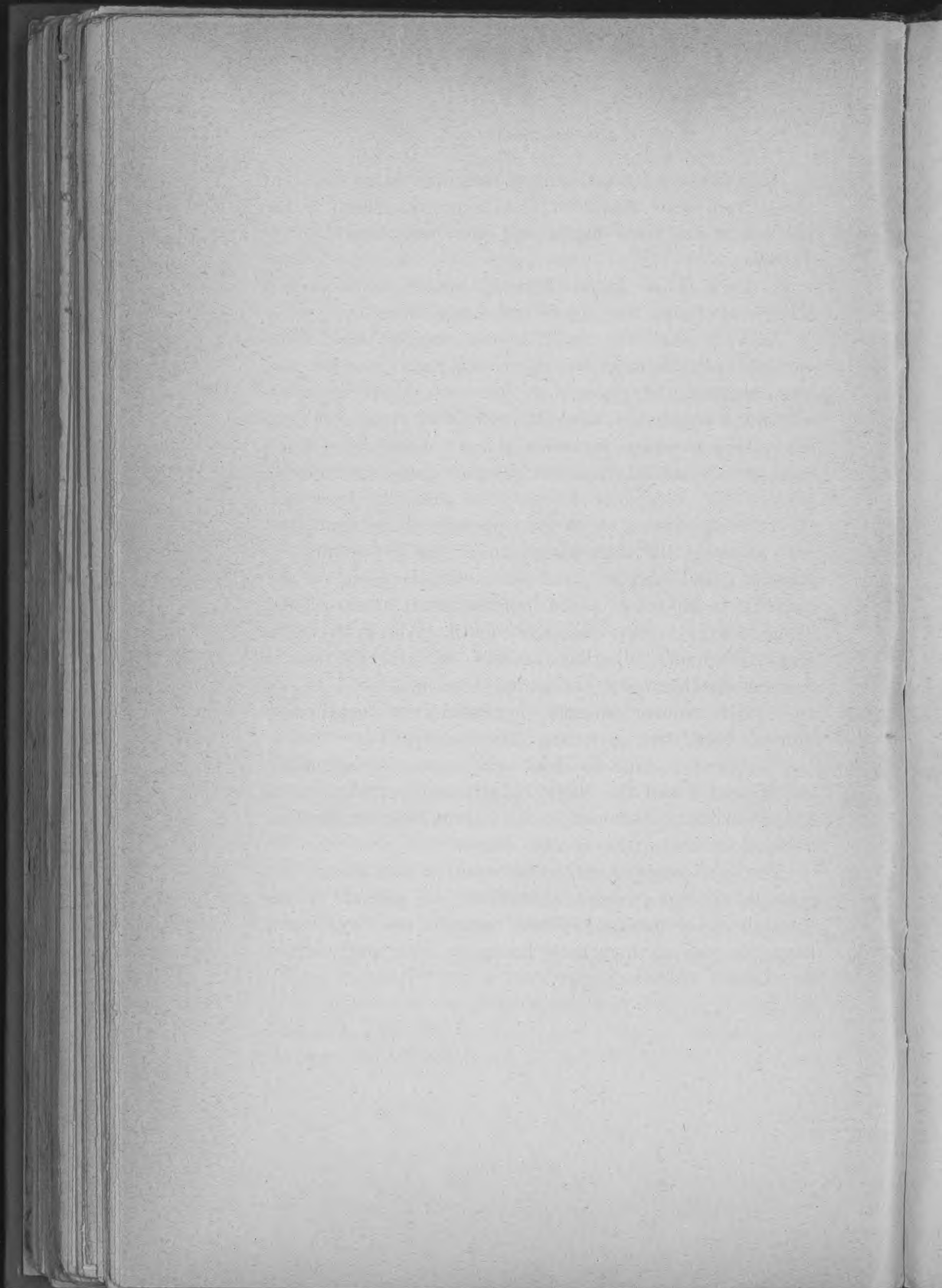
— Park House stands high up out of the flood, said Maggie. Perhaps they have got Lucy there.

Nothing else was said; a new danger was being carried towards them by the river. Some wooden machinery had just given way on one of the wharves, and huge fragments were being floated along. The sun was rising now, and the wide area of watery desolation was spread out in dreadful clearness around them — in dreadful clearness floated onwards the hurrying, threatening masses. A large company in a boat that was working its way along under the Tofton houses, observed their danger, and shouted, « Get out of the current! » But that could not be done at once, and Tom, looking before him, saw death rushing on them. Huge fragments, clinging together in fatal fellowship, made one wide mass across the stream.

— It is coming, Maggie! Tom said, in a deep hoarse voice, loosing the oars, and clasping her.

The next instant the boat was no longer seen upon the water — and the huge mass was hurrying on in hideous triumph. But soon the keel of the boat reappeared, a black speck on the golden water.

The boat reappeared — but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted: living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together.



DANTE GABRIELE ROSSETTI

1828-1882

Dante Gabriele Rossetti, poeta e pittore, nacque a Londra nel maggio del 1828. Suo padre, Gabriele Rossetti, fu il celebratissimo poeta italiano — uno dei più efficaci preparatori ideali del Risorgimento nel mezzogiorno — nativo di Vasto, che costretto a fuggire da Napoli per ragioni politiche, s'era rifugiato a Londra, dove, seguendo l'esempio e l'attività letteraria del Foscolo e commentatore fantasioso di Dante, era stato nominato professore di letteratura italiana al King's College; e a Londra sposò un'italiana, Miss Polidori, figlia di una inglese, e n'ebbe quattro figli, di cui Cristina illustre poetessa e Guglielmo Michele critico eminente.⁴ Dante Gabriele studiò al King's College, ma, sentendosi portato per la pittura, abbandonò la scuola e a quindici anni entrò nella Royal Academy, ove ebbe compagni Holman Hunt e John Everett Millais. Nello studio del Millais, vedendo alcune incisioni ritraenti gli affreschi dei maestri primitivi nel Camposanto di Pisa, i giovani artisti rimasero colpiti dalla bellezza e dalla sincerità spirante da quelle ingenue figure, e vagheggiarono l'idea di ritornare con la pittura ai maestri che precedettero Raffaello e che, a loro giudizio, sentirono più profondamente e ritrassero più sinceramente il mondo reale e spirituale; e nell'autunno dello stesso anno (1850) fu fondata la *Preraphaelite Brotherhood*.

⁴ Su Gabriele Rossetti poeta è sempre assai notevole il bellissimo studio di Giosuè Carducci in *Primi saggi*, pp. 371 e seguenti. Vedi *Opere*, volume secondo.

Per vent'anni il Rossetti fu conosciuto e ammirato come pittore, sebbene fin dalla giovinezza avesse scritto poesie, pubblicandone anche alcune nella rivista preraffaellita *The Germ* (1850); le più circolavano manoscritte, ed eran note solo a un gruppo di amici, tra i quali primeggiavano Algernon Swinburne e George Meredith. Conoscitore perfetto della lingua e della letteratura italiana e studioso appassionato di Dante e dei nostri poeti d'amore del duecento e del primo trecento, cominciò a mano a mano a tradurli sforzandosi di rendere in inglese i metri originali; e vi riuscì meravigliosamente, sebbene talora si permetta, sia pure con arte squisita, di alterare il testo originale. Nel 1861 pubblicò così il volume *Translations from the Early Italian Poets*. Nel 1860 aveva sposato Miss Eleonora Siddal, la bellissima fanciulla tante volte ritratta nei suoi quadri, tempra d'artista anche lei, che ispirò al marito quadri e poesie. Sventura volle che due anni dopo ella morisse per aver preso una dose troppo forte di laudano, che usava a calmare le sue nevralgie. Grande fu il dolore di Rossetti, che in un impeto di disperazione volle chiudere nella bara di lei il manoscritto di tutte le poesie che aveva composte fino a quel giorno. Sette anni dopo, cedendo a malincuore alle insistenze degli amici, sebbene ne provasse poi sempre acuto rimorso, si lasciò indurre a recuperare il manoscritto, che diede alle stampe nel 1870 col titolo di *Poems*. Il volume si apre con la famosa *Blessed Damozel* (La Fanciulla Beata) scritta a diciotto anni, che sembra quasi una figura del Paradiso dantesco, ravvolta com'è in una aureola mistica, di pensiero e sentimento medioevale; originalissima lirica, vera meraviglia per la soave musica della parola e del verso. Allo stesso volume appartiene la stupenda serie di sonetti chiamati *The House of Life*, bellissimi fiori di poesia che hanno tutto il profumo dei nostri poeti del dolce stil novo. Il libro fu salutato da un coro di lodi, nonostante l'attacco sulla *Contemporary Review* di R. Buchanan, che volle atteggiarsi a difensore della pubblica morale. I *Poems* non furono però popolari: c'è nella poesia del Rossetti, e specialmente nei sonetti della *House*

of Life, una certa voluttà d'immagini e di frasi derivanti dal suo temperamento italiano, che un inglese non avrebbe espressa: ancor oggi, nell'opinione generale, la sua poesia è considerata troppo sensuale e voluttuosa per il gusto degli inglesi che poco la leggono. Nel 1881 pubblicò il suo ultimo volume di versi, le *Ballads and Sonnets* con le pittoresche ballate di *Rose Mary*, *Sister Helen*, *The White Ship* e *The King's Tragedy*, esuberante quest'ultimo di potenza drammatica. Rossetti, che dopo la morte della moglie non aveva trovato più pace e soffriva di tormentosa insonnia, combattuta a forza di cloralio, andò sempre più declinando in salute, e a soli cinquantaquattro anni morì a Birchington-on-Sea nell'aprile del 1882.

Il Rossetti fu poeta nuovo e originale, che, come lo Swinburne, aggiunse nuovo colore all'espressione poetica inglese. La sua poesia, specialmente quella scritta nei primi anni, ha una squisita naturalezza, una candida ingenuità di frase e di pensiero: nelle ultime composizioni invece vi è maggiore studio della forma che diviene lievemente arcaica ed elaborata, ma è pur sempre vivamente pittorica. Egli è un poeta a sè: i problemi filosofici ed etici che agitavano i poeti suoi contemporanei non lo interessano punto; le sue poesie sono quasi sempre l'espressione di qualche forte passione, intorno a cui aleggia un sottil velo di misticismo. Ai grandi poeti che lo precedettero, di poco o nulla va debitore: se si vuole avvicinarlo a qualcuno, bisogna pensare al Coleridge, di cui si sente qualche eco nella *Blessed Damozel*, e al Keats, di cui ha la ricca fantasia, l'amore ardente per la bellezza; entrambi questi poeti pongono la loro scena « di là dai magici balconi, sui perigliosi e solitari mari, nei boschi incantati della terra dei sogni ».

SILENT NOON

(From '*The House of Life*')

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass, —
 The finger-points look through like rosy blooms;
 Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
 'Neath billowing skies¹ that scatter and amass.
 All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
 Are golden kingcup-fields² with silver edge
 Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
 'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.³

Deep in the sun-searched growth, the dragon-fly⁴
 Hangs like a blue thread loosen'd from the sky: —
 So this winged hour is dropt to us from above.⁵
 Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
 This close-companion'd⁶ inarticulate hour
 When twofold silence was the song of love.

WILLOWWOOD⁷

I sat with Love upon a woodside well,
 Leaning across the water, I and he;
 Nor ever did he speak nor look'd at me,
 But touch'd his lute wherein was audible

¹ Ondeggianti nubi.

² Calendule.

³ Clessidra.

⁴ Libellula.

⁵ È per noi un dono celeste.

⁶ Tutta nostra.

⁷ Bosco di salice.

The certain secret thing he had to tell:
Only our mirror'd eyes met silently
In the low wave; and that sound came to be
The passionate voice I knew; and my tears fell.

And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers;
And with his foot and with his wing-feathers
He swept the spring that water'd my heart's drouth.
Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair,
And as I stoop'd, her own lips rising there
Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth.

LOVESIGHT

When do I see thee most, beloved one?
When in the light the spirits of mine eyes
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
The worship of that Love through thee made known?
Or when in the dusk hours, (we two alone)
Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies
Thy twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,
And my soul only sees thy soul its own?

O love, my love! if I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring, —
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?

MY SISTER'S SLEEP

She fell asleep on Christmas Eve:
At length the long-ungranted shade
Of weary eyelids overweigh'd ¹
The pain nought else might yet relieve.

Our mother, who had leaned all day
Over the bed from chime to chime
Then raised herself for the first time,
And as she sat her down, did pray.

Her little work-table was spread
With work to finish. For ² the glare
Made by her candle, she had care
To work some distance from the bed. ³

Without there was a cold moon up,
Of winter radiance sheer and thin
The hollow halo it was in
Was like an icy crystal cup.

Through the small room, with subtle sound
Of flame, by vents the fireshine drove
And reddened. ⁴ In its dim alcove ⁵
The mirror shed a clearness round.

¹ Cioè i suoi occhi tenuti aperti dal dolore si chiusero finalmente come gravati dal sonno.

² A causa.

³ Questa lirica è opera giovanile del poeta e fu scritta quando l'influenza dei preraffaelliti era molto forte: vi si nota perciò una ingenuità e semplicità di stile che in seguito il poeta perdette.

⁴ Dalle aperture guizzavan fuori i rossi bagliori del fuoco.

⁵ Recesso.

I had been sitting up some nights,
And my tired mind felt weak and blank;
Like a sharp strengthening wine it drank
The stillness and the broken lights.¹

Twelve struck. That sound, by dwindling years
Heard in each hour, crept off; and then
The ruffled ² silence spread again,
Like water that a pebble stirs.

Our mother rose from where she sat;
Her needles,³ as she laid them down,
Met lightly, and her silken gown
Settled:⁴ no other noise than that.

« Glory unto the Newly Born! »
So as said angels, she did say;
Because we were in Christmas day,
Though it would still be long till morn.

Just then in the room over us
There was a pushing back of chairs,
As some who had sat unawares
So late, now heard the hour, and rose.

With anxious softly-stepping haste ⁵
Our mother went where Margaret lay,
Fearing the sounds o'erhead — should they
Have broken her long watched for rest!

¹ Rotti bagliori.

² Turbato.

³ Ferri da calze.

⁴ Si stese.

⁵ Con piede leggero.

She stopped an instant, calm, and turned;
But suddenly turned back again;¹
And all her features seemed in pain
With woe, and her eyes gazed and yearned.²

For my part, I but hid my face,
And held my breath, and spoke no word:
There was none spoken; but I heard
The silence for a little space.

Our mother bowed herself and wept:
And both my arms fell, and I said,
« God knows I knew that she was dead ».
And there, all white, my sister slept.

Then kneeling, upon Christmas morn,
A little after twelve o'clock
We said, ere the first quarter struck,
« Christ's blessing on the newly born! »³

THE PORTRAIT ⁴

This is her picture as she was:
It seems a thing to wonder on,
As though mine image in the glass
Should tarry⁵ when myself am gone.
I gaze until she seems to stir, —
Until mine eyes almost aver

¹ Si voltò ancora verso il letto.

² Espressero appassionato rimpianto.

³ Nata alla vita eterna.

⁴ È il ritratto della moglie del Rossetti.

⁵ Rimanesse, s'indugiasse.

That now, even now, the sweet lips part ¹
To breathe the words of the sweet heart: —
And yet the earth in over her.

Alas! even such the thin-drawn ray ²
That makes the prison-depths more rude, ³ —
The drip of water night and day
Giving a tongue to solitude.
Yet this, of all love's perfect prize, ⁴
Remains; save what in mournful guise
Takes counsel with my soul alone, —
Save what is secret and unknown,
Below the earth, above the skies.

* * *

¹ Si schiudono.

² Come il sottil raggio.

³ Crudeli.

⁴ Tesoro.

CRISTINA GEORGINA ROSSETTI

1830-1894

Cristina Georgina Rossetti, sorella minore di Dante Gabriele, nacque a Londra nel dicembre del 1830. A diciassette anni fu chiesta in isposa dal pittore Collison, ma ella fervente anglicana, sebbene lo amasse, non volle sposarlo perchè cattolico: ugual rifiuto, e per la stessa ragione, toccò varii anni dopo ad altra persona rimasta tuttora ignota e per la quale scrisse i quattordici sonetti *Monna Innominata*. Triste e sola trascorse la vita, tutta dedicata alle cure della madre, consolata da' pensieri di religione e dalla poesia. Prese parte importante al movimento preraffaellita collaborando prima all'*Atheneum* e poi al *Germ*; e nel 1861 pubblicò *Goblin Market and other Poems* seguito nel 1866 da *The Prince's Progress*: entrambi i volumi furono illustrati dal fratello Dante Gabriele. Passarono molti anni prima che pubblicasse l'altra raccolta di versi *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881). Nel 1896 fu stampato un volume postumo *New Poems* a cura del fratello Guglielmo Michele critico illustre.

Finchè visse Cristina Rossetti fu poco nota ed apprezzata; oggidì non pochi critici, e dei più autorevoli, la considerano la prima poetessa inglese, antepoendola alla stessa Barret Browning. E invero per qualità di poesia, per finitezza e perfezione di verso la Rossetti le è certamente superiore. Ella ebbe il dono della sincerità in sommo grado, un sentimento religioso profondamente sentito, e una grande tristezza,

un grande sconforto terreno che le ispirò i suoi canti migliori:

*Sleeping at last, the trouble and tumult over,
Sleeping at last, the struggle and horror past,
Cold and white out of sight of friend and of lover
Sleeping at last!*

*No more a tired heart down cast or over cast,
No more pangs that wring or shifting fears that hover;
Sleeping at last, in a dreamless sleep locked fast.*

*Fast asleep, singing birds in their leafy cover
Cannot wake her nor shake her the gusty blast.
Under the purple thyme and the purple clover
Sleeping at last!*

Morì nell'inverno del 1894.

SONG

When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad song for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadow,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain;
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.

A PAUSE

They made the chamber sweet with flowers and leaves,
And the bed sweet with flowers on which I lay;
While my soul, love bound, loiter'd on its way.
I did not hear the birds about the eaves,
Nor hear the reapers talk among the sheaves;
Only my soul kept watch from day to day,
My thirsty soul kept watch for one away:—
Perhaps he loves, I thought, remembers, grieves.

At length there came the step upon the stair,
Upon the lock the old familiar hand:
Then first my spirit seem'd to scent the air
Of Paradise; then first the tardy sand
Of time ran golden: and I felt my hair
Put on a glory, and my soul expand.

ECHO

Come to me in the silence of the night;
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream;
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finish'd years.

O dream how sweet, too bitter sweet,
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,
Where souls brimful of love abide and meet;
Where thirsting longing eyes
Watch the slow door
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
My very life again though cold in death;
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
Speak low, lean low,
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

SOMEWHERE OR OTHER...

Somewhere or other there must surely be
The face not seen, the voice not heard,
The heart that not yet — never yet — ah me!
Made answer to my word.

Somewhere or other, may be near or far;
Past land and sea, clean out of sight;
Beyond the wandering moon, beyond the star
That tracks her night by night.

Somewhere or other, may be far or near;
With just a wall, a hedge, between;
With just the last leaves of the dying year
Fallen on a turf grown green.

JOHN RUSKIN

1819-1900

John Ruskin, il più grande prosatore inglese dell'ottocento, nacque a Londra nel 1819. Suo padre, ricco negoziante di vini, uomo di buon gusto e generoso protettore delle arti, crebbe il figlio in un ambiente di artisti, e lo fece di buon'ora viaggiare sul continente, dove egli ebbe agio di ammirare i grandi capolavori dei maestri stranieri che lasciarono una forte impronta sul suo genio e temperamento artistico. Studiò al Christ Church di Oxford, e si laureò, ottenendo anche il Newgate Prize per la poesia. Fin da giovanetto aveva scritto critiche d'arte che preludevano alla sua grande opera, *Modern Painters*, di cui pubblicò il primo dei cinque volumi nel 1843, quando non aveva ancora ventiquattro anni. In quest'opera, che compì soltanto nel 1860, descrive i quadri e discute l'arte dei grandi pittori inglesi, italiani, francesi, spagnuoli e fiamminghi con acuto senso di verità critica, in una prosa colorita, varia, ricca di pittoriche frasi e immagini, di vocaboli usati con senso nuovo e con precisione mirabile. Fino allora le descrizioni non erano state la parte più felice della prosa inglese, se se ne eccettui quelle dello Shelley, che fu grande prosatore quanto poeta: il Gray, il quale nei primi versi della famosa elegia sopra un cimitero di campagna, aveva pur descritto con tanta vivezza l'ora solenne del tramonto, confessava che, quando tentò di descrivere in prosa un levar di sole, vide che « faceva ben misera figura sulla carta ».

Ma qui, con tutto il rispetto al Gray e con buona pace di molti critici, potrebbe osservarsi che la pretesa di rap-

presentare nella realtà viva il mondo esteriore e i fenomeni naturali è uno sfarzo dell'arte della parola, messa quasi in concorrenza con la pittura e la scultura. Può bene lo scrittore, col tono di pochi tasti, suscitare in noi la visione di quel mondo e di quei fenomeni mettendoci in uno stato di animo corrispondente, così, per esempio, come fa Dante nella famosa descrizione della sera;⁴ ma nient'altro può lo scrittore, senza snaturare invano la sua arte. La descrizione per la descrizione, più che pregio nella prosa e nel verso, par segno di decadenza. Essa è in ragione inversa della facoltà d'immaginazione, di pensiero, di ragionamento; per ciò negli scrittori e nelle età più ricche di fantasia e di idee la cercheremmo invano. In Italia piacque e fiorì nei secoli nostri più ornamenti, e civettò tra gli svolazzi e i cartocci del barocco e del rococò. L'artista più stupefacente della descrizione fu per noi il secentista Daniello Bartoli, gesuita, che taluno chiamò — non saprei con quanta precisione di confronto — l'Ariosto della prosa italiana. Pietro Giordani ebbe un ben dirlo *terribile*, quasi dalla descrizione dovesse nascere quello che i retori chiamano *sublime*, quasi il Bartoli svegliasse in noi quel senso tra di stupore e sgomento che esteticamente desta Michelangelo in chi contempla senta mediti il Mosè o gli affreschi della Sistina: nessuno potrà negare che il Bartoli sia scrittore stupendo ma di squisito artificio; nessuno vorrà anteporlo ai grandi e schietti prosatori nostri del cinquecento e di altri secoli.

Il Ruskin, ispirandosi forse ai grandi poeti, a Keats, a Shelley, a Wordsworth e alla Bibbia, riuscì a crearsi uno stile composito tutto suo e a infondere nuovo colore e vigore nella prosa inglese impoverita da un secolo di correttezza accademica. Dopo la pittura prese a studiare l'architettura, e scrisse *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) e le *Stones of Venice*, dove illustra e descrive in pagine sontuose le bellezze di Venezia. Il movimento preraffaellita iniziato da Dante Gabriele Rossetti trovò in Ruskin un apostolo ardente e convinto, che

⁴ Purgatorio, viii, 1-6.

cooperò efficacemente al suo trionfo. Innamorato dell'arte e della bellezza, sentì la miseria dell'arte moderna, la decadenza di ogni ideale; vide e anatemizò la sete del danaro, il vile industrialismo che si affanna ad accumulare brutture sulla faccia della terra. È forse troppo presto per poter renderci conto di ciò che il Ruskin diede al mondo sotto la pompa del suo fulgido stile; ma è indubitato che egli fu il più grande maestro nel descrivere i fenomeni della natura; che, dotato di incomparabile delicatezza e rapidità di osservazione, con la mente libera da ogni convenzionalismo, vide dinanzi a sé il mondo fisico in tutta la sua bellezza e non potè resistere al fascino di dividere col pubblico la sua meraviglia e la sua gioia a quelle rivelazioni. Si scorgerà infine che le sue elaborate, ma spesso fantastiche e talvolta anche incoerenti, dissertazioni sull'arte si risolvono in questo: 'l'estasi di un uomo che vede sulle nubi o sulle tele, su di un fiore o su di un messale visioni di luminosa bellezza, ch'egli ha l'insuperata arte di poter subito ed efficacemente tradurre in parole'.⁴

⁴ E. Gosse, op. cit., pag. 385.

TURNER'S¹ HEYSHAM

(From 'Modern Painters')

The subject is a simple north-country village, on the shore of Morecambe Bay; not in the common sense a picturesque village; there are no pretty bow-windows, or red roofs, or rocky steps of entrance to the rustic doors, or quaint gables;² nothing but a single street of thatched³ and chiefly clay-built cottages, ranged in a somewhat monotonous line, the roofs so green with moss that at first we hardly discern the houses from the fields and trees. The village street is closed at the end by a wooden gate, indicating the little traffic there is on the road through it, and giving it something the look of a large farmstead, in which a right of way lies through the yard. The road which leads to this gate is full of ruts, and winds down a bad bit of hill between two broken banks of moor ground succeeding immediately to the few enclosures which surround the village; they can hardly be called gardens: but a decayed fragment or two of fencing fill the gaps in the bank; a clothes line, with some clothes in it, striped blue and red, and a smock-frock, is stretched between the trunks of some stunted willows; a *very* small haystack and pig-stye being seen at the back of the cottage beyond. An empty, two-wheeled, lumbering cart, drawn by a pair of horses

¹ William Turner (1775-1851) è il più grande pittore inglese dell'ottocento famoso per le sue bellissime marine.

² Nelle antiche case inglesi la facciata termina in punta: la *gable* è la parte triangolare della facciata compresa tra il tetto e il cornicione. Molte città inglesi hanno ancora tutte le case sormontate da queste *gables* che danno loro un aspetto originale e pittoresco.

³ Coperto di paglia.

with huge wooden collars, the driver sitting lazily in the sun, sideways on the leader, is going slowly home along the rough road, it being about country dinner-time. At the end of the village there is a better house, with three chimneys and a dormer-window¹ in its roof, and the roof is of stone shingle² instead of thatch, but very rough. This house is no doubt the clergyman's: there is some smoke from one of its chimneys, none from any other in the village; this smoke is from the lowest chimney at the back, evidently that of the kitchen, and it is rather thick, the fire not having been long lighted. A few hundred yards from the clergyman's house, nearer the shore, is the church, discernible from the cottages only by its low two-arched belfry, a little neater than one would expect in such a village; and beyond the church, close to the sea, are two fragments of a border war-tower, standing on their circular mound, worn on its brow deep into edges and furrows by the feet of the village children. On the bank of moor, which forms the foreground, are a few cows, the carter's dog barking at a vixenish one:³ the milkmaid is feeding another, a gentle white one which turns its head to her, expectant of a handful of fresh hay, which she has brought for it in her blue apron, fastened up round her waist; she stands with her pail on her head, evidently the village coquette, for she has a neat bodice, and pretty striped petticoat under the blue apron, and red stockings. Nearer us, the cowherd, bare-footed stands on a piece of the limestone rock (for the ground is thistly and not pleasurable to bare feet); — whether boy or girl we are

¹ Abbaino.

² Embrice.

³ A una vecchia mucca.

not sure: it may be a boy, with a girl wornout bonnet on, or a girl with a pair of ragged trowsers on; probably the first, as the old bonnet is evidently useful to keep the sun out of our eyes when we are looking for strayed cows among the moorland hollows, and helps us at present to watch (holding the bonnet's edge down) the quarrel of the vixenish cow with the dog, which, leaning on our long stick, we allow to proceed without any interference. A little to the right the hay is being got in, of which the milkmaid has just taken her apronful to the white cow; but the hay is very thin, and cannot well be raked up because of the rocks; we must glean it like corn, hence the smallness of our stack behind the willows; and a woman is pressing a bundle of it hard together, kneeling against the rock's edge, to carry it safely to the hay-cart without dropping any. Beyond the village is a rocky hill, deep set with brushwood,¹ a square crag² or two of limestone³ emerging here and there, with pleasant turf on their brows, heaved in russet and mossy mounds against the sky, which clear and calm, and as golden as the moss, stretches down behind it towards the sea. A single cottage just shows its roof over the edge of the hill, looking seawards: perhaps one of the village shepherds is a sea captain now, and may have built it there, that his mother may first see the sails of his ship whenever it runs into the bay. Then under the hill, and beyond the border tower, is the blue sea itself, the waves flowing in over the sand in long curved lines slowly; shadows of cloud, and gleams of shallow water on white sand alternating —

¹ Boscaglia.

² Rupe.

³ Calcare.

miles away; but no sail is visible, not one fisher-boat on the beach, not one dark speck on the quiet horizon. Beyond all are the Cumberland mountains, clear in the sun, with rosy light on all their crags.

I should think the readers cannot but feel the kind of harmony there is in this composition; the entire purpose of the painter to give us the impression of wild, yet gentle country life, monotonous as the succession of the noiseless waves, patient and enduring as the rocks; but peaceful, and full of health and quiet hope, and sanctified by the pure mountain air and baptismal dew of heaven, falling softly between days of toil and nights of innocence.

THE SLAVE SHIP

(From '*Modern Painters*' § 39)

I think, the noblest sea that Turner has ever painted, and, if so, the noblest certainly ever painted by man, is that of the Slave Ship, the chief Academy picture of the Exhibition of 1840. It is a sunset on the Atlantic, after prolonged storm; but the storm is partially lulled, and the torn and streaming rain-clouds are moving in scarlet lines to lose themselves in the hollow of the night. The whole surface of sea included in the picture is divided into two ridges¹ of enormous swell,² not high, nor local,³ but a low broad heaving of the whole ocean, like the lifting of its bosom by deep-drawn breath after the torture of the storm. Between these two ridges the fire of the sunset falls along the trough⁴ of the sea,

¹ Masse.

² Ampiezza.

³ Limitate.

⁴ Solco (che è tra le due masse d'acqua sollevata).

dyeing it with an awful but glorious light, the intense and lurid splendour which burns like gold, and bathes like blood. Along this fiery path and valley, the tossing waves, by which the swell of the sea is restlessly divided, lift themselves in dark, indefinite, fantastic forms, each casting a faint and ghastly shadow behind it along the illumined foam. They do not rise everywhere, but three or four together in wild groups, fitfully and furiously, as the under strength of the swell compels or permits them; leaving between them treacherous spaces of level and whirling water, now lighted with green and lamp-like fire, now flashing back the gold of the declining sun, now fearfully dyed from above with the indistinguishable images of the burning clouds, which fall upon them in flakes of crimson and scarlet, and give to the reckless waves, the added motion of their own fiery flying. Purple and blue, the lurid shadows of the hollow breakers are cast upon the mist of night, which gathers cold and low, advancing like the shadow of death upon the guilty ship ¹ as it labours ² amidst the lightening of the sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood, girded with condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror and mixes its flaming flood with the sunlight, and, cast far along the desolate heave of the sepulchral waves, incarnadines the multitudinous sea. ³ —

¹ « She is a slaver, throwing her slaves overboard. The near sea is encumbered with corpses ». (Ruskin's note).

² Naviga.

³ Imporpora le infinite onde del mare. Cfr. Shakspeare:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clear from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous sea incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

Macbeth, atto II, scena II.

SPLENDOURS OF SUNSET

(From '*Modern Painters*' § 7)

Nature has a thousand ways and means of rising above herself, but incomparably the noblest manifestations of her capability of colour are in these sunsets among the high clouds. I speak especially of the moment before the sun sinks, when his light turns pure rose-colour and when this light falls upon a zenith covered with countless cloud-forms of inconceivable delicacy, threads and flakes of vapour, which would in common daylight be pure snow-white, and which give, therefore, fair field to the tone of light. There is, then, no limit to the multitude, and no check to the intensity, of the hues assumed. The whole sky from the zenith to the horizon becomes one molten mantling¹ sea of colour and fire; every black bar turns into massy gold, every ripple and wave into unsullied shadowless crimson, and purple and scarlet, and colours for which there are no words in language, and no ideas in the mind — things which can only be conceived while they are visible; the intense hollow blue of the upper sky melting through it all, showing here deep, and pure, and lightless; there, modulated by the filmy formless body of the transparent vapour, till it is lost imperceptibly in its crimson and gold.

The concurrence of circumstances necessary to produce the sunsets of which I speak does not take place above five or six times in a summer, and then only for a space of from five to ten minutes, just as the sun reaches the horizon. Considering how seldom people

¹ Spumeggiante.

think of looking for a sunset at all, and how seldom, if they do, they are in a position from which it can be fully seen, the chances that their attention should be awake, and their position favourable, during these few flying instants of the year, are almost as nothing. What can the citizen, who can see only the red light on the canvas of the waggon at the end of the street, and the crimson colour of the bricks of his neighbour's chimney, know of the flood of fire which deluges the sky from the horizon to the zenith? What can even the quiet inhabitant of the English lowlands, whose scene for the manifestation of the fire of heaven is limited to the tops of hayricks, and the rooks' nests in the old elm trees, know of the mighty passages of splendour which are tossed from Alp to Alp over the azure of a thousand miles of champaign? Even granting the constant vigour of observation, and supposing the possession of such impossible knowledge, it needs but a moment's reflection to prove how incapable the memory is of retaining for any time the distinct image of the sources even of its most vivid impressions.

What recollection have we of the sunsets which delighted us last year? We may know that they were magnificent, or glowing, but no distinct image of colour or form is retained — nothing of whose *degree* (for the great difficulty with the memory is to retain, not facts, but degrees of fact) we could be so certain as to say of anything now presented to us, that it is like it. If we did say so, we should be wrong; for we may be quite certain that the energy of an impression fades from the memory, and becomes more and more indistinct every day; and thus we compare a faded and indistinct image with the decision and certainty of one present to the senses. How constantly do we affirm that the

thunderstorm of last week was the most terrible one we ever saw in our lives, because we compare it, not with the thunderstorm of last year, but with the faded and feeble recollection of it.

NORTH AND SOUTH

(From '*The Stones of Venice*' § 8)

The charts of the world which have been drawn up by modern science have thrown into a narrow space¹ the expression of a vast amount of knowledge; but I have never yet seen any one pictorial enough to enable the spectator to imagine the kind of contrast in physical character which exists between Northern and Southern countries. We know the differences in detail, but we have not that broad glance and grasp which would enable us to feel them in their fulness. We know that gentians grow on the Alps, and olives on the Apennines: but we do not enough conceive for ourselves that variegated mosaic of the world's surface which a bird sees in its migration, that difference between the districts of the gentian and of the olive which the stork and the swallow see far off, as they lean upon the sirocco wind. Let us for a moment try to raise ourselves even above the level of their flight, and imagine the Mediterranean lying beneath us like an irregular lake, and all its ancient promontories sleeping in the sun: here and there an angry spot of thunder,² a grey stain of storm, moving upon the burning field; here and there a fixed wreath of white volcano smoke, surrounded by its circles of

¹ Hanno raccolto, racchiuso.

² Una macchia dove il tuono brontola rabbiosamente.

ashes; but for the most part a great peacefulness of light, Syria and Greece, Italy and Spain, laid like pieces of a golden pavement into the sea-blue, chased,¹ as we stoop nearer to them, with bossy beaten work² of mountain chains, and glowing softly with terrace gardens, and flowers heavy with frank-incense, mixed among masses of laurel and orange, and plummy palm, that abate with their grey-green shadows the burning of the marble rocks, and the ledges³ of porphyry sloping under lucent sand. Then let us pass farther towards the north, until we see the orient colours change gradually into a vast belt of rainy green, where the pastures of Switzerland, and poplars valleys of France, and dark forests of the Danube and Carpathians stretch from the mouths of the Loire to those of the Volga, seen through clefts⁴ in grey swirls⁵ of rain-cloud and flaky veils of the mist of the brooks, spreading low along the pasture lands: and then, farther north still, to see the earth heave into mighty masses of leaden rock and heathy moor,⁶ bordering with a broad waste of gloomy purple that belt of field and wood and splintering into irregular and grisly islands amidst the northern seas, beaten by storm, and chilled by ice-drift, and tormented by furious pulses of contenting tide, until the roots of the last forests fail from among the hill ravines, and the hunger of the north wind bites their peaks into barrenness; and, at last, the wall of ice, durable like iron, sets, deathlike, its white teeth against us out of the polar

¹ Cesellato.

² Lavoro a sbalzo (alto rilievo).

³ Catene.

⁴ Squarci.

⁵ Vortici.

⁶ Brughiera.

twilight. And, having once traversed in thought this gradation of the zoned iris of the earth in all its material vastness, let us go down nearer to it, and watch the parallel change in the belt of animal life: the multitudes of swift and brilliant creatures that glance in the air and sea, or tread the sands of the southern zone: striped zebras and spotted leopards, glistening serpents, and birds arrayed in purple and scarlet. Let us contrast their delicacy and brilliancy of colour, and swiftness of motion, with the frost-cramped ¹ strength, and shaggy ² covering, and dusky plumage of the northern tribes; contrast the Arabian horse with the Shetland, the tiger and leopard with the wolf and bear, the antelope with the elk, ³ the bird of paradise with the osprey: ⁴ and then, submissively acknowledging the great laws by which the earth and all it bears are ruled throughout their being, let us not condemn, but rejoice in the expression by man of his own rest in the statutes of the lands that gave him birth. Let us watch him with reverence as he sets side by side the burning gems, and smooths with soft sculpture the jasper pillars, that are to reflect a ceaseless sunshine and rise into a cloudless sky: but not with less reverence let us stand by him, when, with rough strength and hurried stroke, he smites an uncouth animation out of the rocks which he has torn from among the moss of the moorland, and heaves into the darkened air the pile of iron buttress and rugged wall, instinct with a work of an imagination as wild and wayward as the northern sea: creations of

¹ Intorpidita dal gelo.

² Irsuto, ispido.

³ Daino del Canada.

⁴ Specie di aquila. Lat. *ossifraga*.

ungainly shape and rigid limb, but full of wolfish life: fierce as the winds that beat and changeful as the clouds that shade them.

SOUTH ITALY

(From '*Modern Painters*' § 12)

We are accustomed to hear the south of Italy spoken of as a beautiful country. Its mountain forms are graceful above others, its sea bays exquisite in outline and hue; but it is only beautiful in superficial aspect. In closer details it is wild and melancholy. Its forests are sombre-leaved, labyrinth-stemmed;¹ the carubbe, the olive, laurel, and ilex, are alike in that strange feverish twisting² of their branches, as if in spasms of half human pain: — Avernus forests; one fears to break their boughs, lest they should cry to us from the rents; the rocks they shade are of ashes, or thrice-molten lava; iron sponge whose every pore has been filled with fire. Silent villages, earthquake shaken, without commerce, without industry, without knowledge, without hope gleam in white ruin from hillside to hillside: far-winding wrecks of immemorial walls surround the dust of cities long forsaken: the mountain streams moan through the cold arches of their foundations, green with weed, and rage over the heaps of their fallen towers. Far above, in thunder-blue serration,³ stand the eternal edges of the angry Appennine, dark with rolling impendence of volcanic cloud.⁴

¹ Dai fusti intricati come in un laberinto.

² Contorsioni.

³ In massa serrata cupo azzurro.

⁴ Fosco per le nubi vulcaniche che vi pendon sopra, lo sovrastano.

PINE FOREST IN THE JURA

(From '*The Seven Lamps of Architecture*')

Among the hours of his life to which the writer looks back with peculiar gratitude, as having been marked by more than ordinary fulness of joy or clearness of teaching, is one passed, now some years ago, near time of sunset, among the broken masses of pine forest which skirt the course of the Ain, above the village of Champagnole, in the Jura. It is a spot which has all the solemnity, with none of the savageness of the Alps; where there is a sense of a great power beginning to be manifested in the earth, and of a deep and majestic concord in the rise of the long low lines of piny hills; the first utterance¹ of those mighty mountain symphonies, soon to be more loudly lifted and wildly broken along the battlements of the Alps. But their strength is as yet restrained; and the far-reaching ridges² of pastoral mountain succeed each other, like the long and sighing swell³ which moves over quiet waters from some far off stormy sea. And there is a deep tenderness pervading that vast monotony. The destructive forces and the stern expression of the central ranges are alike withdrawn. No frost-ploughed, dust-encumbered paths of ancient glacier fret the soft Jura pastures; no splintered heaps of ruin break the fair ranks of her forests; no pale, defiled, or furious rivers rend their rude and changeful ways among her rocks. Patiently, eddy by

¹ Voce.

² Catene.

³ Ansito,

eddy, the clear green streams wind along their well-known beds; and under the dark quietness of the undisturbed pines, there spring up, year by year, such company of joyful flowers as I know not the like of among all the blessings of the earth. It was Spring time, too; and all were coming forth in clusters crowded for very love; there was room enough for all, but they crushed their leaves into all manner of strange shapes only to be nearer each other. There was the wood anemone, star after star, closing every now and then into *nebulae*; ¹ and there was the *oxalis*, ² troop by troop, like virginal processions of the *Mois de Marie*, the dark vertical clefts in the limestone choked up with them as with heavy snow, and touched with ivy on the edges — ivy as light and lovely as the vine; and ever and anon, a blue gush of violets, and cowslip bells in sunny places; and in the more open ground the small sapphire buds of the *Polygala Alpina* and the wild strawberry, just a blossom or two, all showered amidst the golden softness of deep, warm, amber-coloured moss. I came out presently on the edge of the ravine: the solemn murmur of its waters rose suddenly from beneath, mixed with the singing of the thrushes among the pine boughs; and on the opposite side of the valley, walled all along as it was by grey cliffs of limestone, there was a hawk sailing slowly off their brow, touching them nearly with his wings, and with the shadows of the pines flickering upon his plumage from above; but with a fall of a hundred fathoms under his breast, and the curling pools of the green river gliding and glittering dizzily beneath him, their foam globes moving with him

¹ *Nebulosa*.

² *Acetosella*.

as he flew. It would be difficult to conceive a scene less dependent upon any other interest than that of its own secluded and serious beauty; but the writer well remembers the sudden blankness and chill which were cast upon it when he endeavoured, in order more strictly to arrive at the sources of its impressiveness, to imagine it, for a moment, a scene in some aboriginal forest of the New Continent. The flowers in an instant lost their light, the river its music; the hills became oppressively desolate; a heaviness in the boughs of the darkened forest showed how much of their former power had been dependent upon a life which was not their, how much of the glory of the imperishable, or continually renewed creation is reflected from things more precious in their memories than it, in its renewing. Those ever springing flowers and ever flowing streams had been dyed by the deep colours of human endurance, valour and virtue; and the crests of the sable ¹ hills that rose against the evening sky received a deeper worship, because their far shadows fell eastward over the iron wall of Joux, and the four-square keep ² of Granson.

THE CAMPAGNA

Perhaps there is no more impressive scene on earth than the solitary extent of the Campagna of Rome under evening light. Let the reader imagine himself for a moment withdrawn from the sounds and motion of the living world, and sent forth alone into this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles ³ beneath

¹ Brune (poetico).

² Massiccia torre.

³ Si sgretola.

his foot tread he never so lightly, for its substance is white, hollow, and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men. The long knotted grass waves and tosses feebly in the evening wind, and the shadows of its motion shake feverishly along the banks of ruin that lift themselves to the sunlight. Hillocks of mouldering earth heave around him, as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep; scattered blocks of black stone, four-square, remnants of mighty edifices, not one left upon another, lie upon them to keep them down.

A dull purple poisonous haze stretches level along the desert, veiling its spectral wrecks of massy ruins, on whose rents the red light rests, like a dying fire on defiled altars. The blue ridge of the Alban Mount lifts itself against a solemn space of green, clear, quiet sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds¹ stand steadfastly along the promontories of the Appenines. From the plain to the mountains, the shattered aqueducts, pier beyond pier, melt into darkness like shadowy and countless troops of funeral mourners, passing from a nation's grave.

¹ Fosche nubi come torri di vedetta.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

1837-1909

Algernon Carlo Swinburne, l'ultimo dei grandi poeti inglesi dell'era Vittoriana, nacque a Londra il 5 aprile 1837 da nobile famiglia del Northumberland; e in questa silvestre contea, nel castello di Capheaton, trascorse la sua giovinezza in mezzo alla natura selvaggia, tra le solitudini del mare e delle foreste. Nell'irrompere delle sue armonie più poetiche sentiamo la voce degli elementi primigenii, del mare e dei venti; che' lo Swinburne, come Heine e più di Heine, è il poeta del mare, sogno e passione della sua vita. Il suono e il colore dell'onda agitata vivono quasi in ogni suo canto:

*The sea, that harbours in her heart sublime
The supreme heart of music deep as time,
And in her spirit strong
The spirit of all imaginable song.*

Sua madre, Lady Enrichetta Ashburnham, educata a Firenze, gli fu guida amorosa nei primi studi e gl'inspirò il grande amore ch'ebbe sempre per l'Italia, per la sua lingua e la sua letteratura. Dai dodici ai diciassette anni fu a Eton, e poi all'Università di Oxford, di dove partì senza aver preso alcun grado accademico. A Oxford si legò di intima amicizia con tre uomini di genio: Dante Gabriele Rossetti, William Morris e Burne Jones, i futuri instauratori della gloriosa scuola preraffaellita. Prima di lasciare Oxford, Swinburne aveva già scritto due drammi: *The Queen Mother* e *Rosamund* (1861), che, per quanto immaturi di concezione ed imperfetti

*the Queen Mother
the Rosamund*

di esecuzione, già preludevano alla grande trilogia drammatica di Maria Stuarda. Dopo un viaggio in Francia, il poeta venne in Italia: si fermò a lungo a Firenze, e vi conobbe il Mazzini pel quale ebbe poi sempre una reverenza non scevra di entusiasmo e al quale dedicò una delle sue grandi odi *A Song of Italy*. Tornato a Londra, abitò col Rossetti e col Meredith una stessa casa; ma dopo un anno gli amici si divisero e Swinburne cambiò spesso dimora preferendo fermarsi in riva al mare. Nel 1865, a ventisette anni, pubblicò *Atalanta in Calydon* che ad un tratto rivelò la sua grandezza di poeta. La tragica bellezza della leggenda di Altea e di suo figlio Meleagro è così animata dalla fiamma del genio del poeta, e la musica del verso è così ricca e melodiosa, che anche i più ritrosi fra i critici dovettero riconoscere che un genio nuovo e potente era apparso sull'orizzonte poetico dell'Inghilterra. Si ricordino i magnifici cori, tra gli altri il bellissimo:

*Before the beginning of years,
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran;
Pleasure, with pain for leaven;
Summer with flowers that fell;
Remembrance fallen from heaven,
And madness risen from hell;
Strength without hands to smite;
Love that endures for a breath;
Night, the shadow of light,
And life, the shadow of death.*

Nello stesso anno (1865) pubblicò *Chastelard*, dramma che ha per soggetto l'infelice amante di Maria Stuarda, concepito alla maniera di Shakspeare, dal verso rapido, pieno di vita e di fuoco, che insieme con *Bothwell* e *Maria Stuarda* forma la più grande trilogia drammatica delle letterature moderne. L'anno dopo la pubblicazione del *Chastelard*, Swinburne pubblicò una raccolta di liriche, i famosi *Poems and Ballads*

(1866) che per il loro ardente sensualismo e la bellezza quasi satanica di alcune strofe scatenarono sul giovane poeta le ire del pubblico inglese. Il poeta nella sua celebre difesa *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, dopo avere affermato il carattere drammatico e impersonale del libro, dice scherzosamente: 'Ho dimenticato di mettere innanzi al mio lavoro questo avvertimento di un grande poeta:

*J'en prévient les mères des familles,
Ce que j'écris n'est pas pour les petites filles
Dont on coupe le pain en tartines; mes vers
Sont de vers de jeune homme.*

Non si può certo negare che quest'opera appartenga alla 'Scuola sensuale', come la chiamò Roberto Buchanan, alla più idealmente depravata ed esaltata delle scuole letterarie, che s'inspirò in parte al Baudelaire e in cui si trovano i primi germi dell'arte modernissima che si compiace rappresentare la lussuria dolorosa, dalla *Salomé* di Oscar Wilde alle figure femminili dannunziane, di Basiliola, Fedra, Isabella. Ma non per questo i *Poems and Ballads* sono meno mirabile opera d'arte: hanno una musica tutta loro propria, di una malia irresistibile: il genio del poeta si rivela qui affine a quello di Saffo, di Catullo e di Marlowe. Poichè Swinburne è il più grande creatore di armonie, il più meraviglioso inventore di metri che sia mai apparso nella letteratura inglese. 'Può ben dirsi di lui — afferma il suo più illustre critico, Teodoro Watts-Dunton, che non abbia scritto poesia senza trovare un nuovo metro, più melodioso di quello che ogni altro poeta inglese potesse inventare'. Quali saggi della stupenda varietà de' suoi ritmi e della ricchezza musicale delle sue strofe si leggano le famose liriche *Anactoria*, *Laus Veneris*, *Dolores*, *The Garden of Proserpina* e *Nympholept*, una delle ultime sue composizioni, di cui riporto i primi versi magnifici descriventi un meriggio d'estate:

*Summer, and noon, and a splendour of silence, felt,
Seen, and heard, of the spirit within the sense.*

*Soft through the frondage the shades of the sunbeams melt
 Sharp through the foliage the shafts of them, keen and dense,
 Cleave, as discharged from the string of the God's bow, tense
 As a war-steed's girth, and bright as a warrior's belt.
 Ah, why should an hour that is heaven for an hour pass
 [hence?*

È noto che Giuseppe Mazzini ebbe a manifestare al poeta, un giorno che questi a Londra era andato a visitarlo, tutto il suo disgusto per un genere d'ispirazione e di arte come quello dei *Poems and Ballads*, e che lo ammonì amicamente a consacrare il suo genio a ideali più altamente e spiritualmente umani. E l'ammonimento non pare andasse a vuoto. Dei poeti inglesi del secolo decimonono quello che diventò più caro ai grandi artefici del nostro Risorgimento fu appunto lo Swinburne, ed è risaputo ch'era prediletto in casa di Aurelio e Giorgina Saffi a Bologna e a San Varano.

Dopo i *Poems and Ballads* Swinburne pubblicò altri volumi di poesia che accrebbero e affermarono la sua fama: *A Song of Italy* (1867); *Songs before Sunrise*, (1871) alquanto ineguali di esecuzione ed esagerati di sentimento, *Bothwell* (1874), lunghissima tragedia che ha dei passi bellissimi, *Erechtheus* (1875), il miglior tentativo di dramma greco in inglese; la seconda serie dei *Poems and Ballads* (1878), forse il migliore di questi volumi, che ha una gran varietà di motivi lirici e che mostra la sua straordinaria padronanza nell'usare qualsiasi metro.

(1845) Il secondo periodo dell'opera del poeta si può far cominciare dal 1881. E comprende *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882), il potente dramma *Marino Faliero*; il commovente *Lochrine* (1887) e *Astrophel* (1894) uno dei suoi più bei lavori, ricco di musica e di fascino. Swinburne è anche grande come scrittore di prosa e critico illustre. Cominciò col saggio su *William Blake* (1867) e si occupò specialmente dei poeti drammatici Elisabetiani pei quali ebbe ammirazione di entusiasta. Gli si può rimproverare di non aver troppa misura sia nella lode sia nel biasimo, di lasciarsi trasportare da impeti di odio e d'amore;

ma ha pur sempre vivo il senso della verità critica e una smagliante eloquenza di esposizione.

Swinburne fu il continuatore delle grandi tradizioni di Shelley e di Keats. Poeta anglo-sassone, egli è anche un latino, e nella versatilità dell'ingegno fuse armoniosamente le attitudini e i sogni delle due razze sovrane: sentì profondamente il classicismo e il romanticismo, e fece rivivere con la forza dell'anglo-sassone moderno gli eroi e i miti del mondo pagano e del cristiano. La sua lira possente ha corde per ogni melodia: nei *Poems and Ballads* si rivelò poeta panteista e sensuale, pieno di liberi ardimenti; nell'*Atalanta in Calydon* fu poeta classico, puro e severo, nutrito dell'arte greco-italica; nei *Songs before Sunrise* cantò con impeto rivoluzionario victorhughiano il trionfo della repubblica e della libertà. Non si deve però credere che la poesia di Swinburne sia esente da difetti: ha soprattutto troppa esuberanza di suoni e d'immagini, e una inclinazione troppo spiccata alla verbosità (*wordiness* come dicono gl'inglesi); e ciò nuoce alla perfezione della sua opera artistica.

Dopo il 1878 il poeta abbandonò la vita agitata di Londra ritirandosi a vivere con l'amico Teodoro Watts Dunton nella villa 'The Pines' sul colle di Putney, dove morì il 10 aprile 1909.

A BALLAD OF DREAMLAND

I hid my heart in a nest of roses,
Out of the sun's way, hidden apart;
In a softer bed than the soft white snow's is,
Under the roses I hid my heart.
Why would it sleep not? why should it start,
When never a leaf of the rose-tree stirred?
What made sleep flutter his wings and part?
Only the song of a secret bird.

Lie still, I said, for the wind's wing closes,
And mild leaves muffle the keen sun's dart;
Lie still, for the wind on the warm sea dozes,
And the wind is unquieter yet than thou art.
Does a thought in thee still as a thorn's wound smart?
Does the fang still fret thee of hope deferred?
What bids the lids of thy sleep dispart?
Only the song of a secret bird.

The green land's name that a charm encloses,
It never was writ in the traveller's chart,
And sweet on its trees as the fruit that grows is,
It never was sold in the merchant's mart.
The swallows of dreams through its dim fields dart,
And sleep's are the tunes in its tree-tops heard;
No hound's note wakens the wildwood hart,
Only the song of a secret bird.

In the world of dreams I have chosen my part,
To sleep for a season and hear no word
Of true love's truth or of light love's art,
Only the song of a secret bird.

SONG

Love laid his sleepless head
On a thorny rosy bed;
And his eyes with tears were red,
And pale his lips as the dead.

And fear and sorrow and scorn
Kept watch by his head forlorn,
Till the night was overworn¹
And the world was merry with morn.

And Joy came up with the day
And kissed Love's lips as he lay,
And the watchers ghostly and gray
Sped from his pillow away.²

And his eyes as the dawn grew bright,
And his lips waxed ruddy³ as light:
Sorrow may reign for a night,
But day shall bring back delight.

BY THE NORTH SEA

A land that is lonelier than ruin;
A sea that is stranger than death;
Far fields that a rose never blew in,
Wan⁴ waste where the winds lack breath;⁵

¹ Si consumò, finì.

² To speed away = fuggir via.

³ Rosse.

⁴ Triste, scialbo.

⁵ Mancano di respiro, di forza, si perdono.

Waste endless and boundless and flowerless
But of marsh-blossoms fruitless as free;¹
Where earth lies exhausted, as powerless
To strive with the sea.

Far flickers the flight² of the swallows,
Far flutters the weft³ of the grass
Spun dense over desolate hollows
More pale than the clouds as they pass;
Thick woven as the web of a witch is
Round the heart of a thrall⁴ that hath sinned,
Whose youth and the wreck of its riches
Are waifs⁵ on the wind.

The pastures are herdless, and sheepless,
No pasture or shelter for herds:
The wind is relentless and sleepless,
And restless and songless the birds;
Their cries from afar fall breathless,⁶
Their wings are as lightnings that flee;
For the land has two lords that are deathless:
Death's self, and the sea.

THE DEATH OF SUMMER

In the month of the long decline of roses
I, beholding the summer dead before me,
Set my face to the sea and journeyed silent,

¹ Senza neanche fiori di padule.

² Il volo.

³ La trama, la rete, la massa.

⁴ Schiavo.

⁵ Cose perdute, abbandonate.

⁶ Giungono fevoli all'orecchio.

Gazing eagerly where above the sea-mark ¹
Flame as fierce as the fervid eyes of lions
Half divided the eyelids of the sunset;
Till I heard as it were a noise of waters
Moving tremulous under feet of angels
Multitudinous, out of all the heavens ²
Knew the fluttering wind, ³ the fluttered foliage,
Shaken fitfully, ⁴ full of sound and shadow;
And saw, trodden upon ⁵ by noiseless angels,
Long mysterious reaches ⁶ fed by moonlight,
Sweet sad straits in a soft subsiding channel, ⁷
Blown about ⁸ by the lips of winds I knew not,
Winds not born in the north nor any quarter,
Winds not warm with the south nor any sunshine;
Heard between them a voice of exultation,
« Lo, the summer is dead, the sun is faded,
Even like as a leaf, the year is withered;
All the fruits of the day from all her branches
Gathered, neither is any left to gather.
All the flowers are dead, the tender blossoms
All are taken away: the season wasted,
Like an ember among the fallen ashes.
Now with the light of the winter days, with moonlight,
Light of snow, and the bitter light of hoarfrost.
We bring flowers that fade not after autumn,
Pale white chaplets and crowns of latter seasons,

¹ Estremo limite del mare.

² Scesi da tutti i cieli.

³ Conobbi l'ondeggiar del vento.

⁴ Scosso a sbalzi.

⁵ Sfiorate.

⁶ Distese.

⁷ Dolci e mesti gorghi sboccare in un canale lievemente abbassantesi.

⁸ Agitati.

Fair false leaves (but the summer leaves were falser),
Woven under the eyes of stars and planets
Where low light was upon the windy reaches
Where the flower of foam was blown, a lily
Dropt among the sonorous fruitless furrows
And green fields of the sea that make no pasture:
Since the winter begins, the weeping winter,
All whose flowers are tears, and round his temples
Iron blossom of frost is bound for ever.»

THE OBLATION

Ask nothing more of me, sweet;
All I can give you I give.
Heart of my heart, were it more,
More would be laid at your feet:
Love that should help you to live,
Song that should spur you to soar.

All things were nothing to give
Once to have sense of you more,
Touch you and taste of you sweet,
Think you and breathe you and live,
Swept of your wings as they soar
Trodden by chance of your feet.

I that have love and no more
Give you but love of you, sweet:
He that hath more, let him give;
He that hath wings, let him soar;
Mine is the heart at your feet
Here, that must love you to live.

BETWEEN THE SUNSET AND THE SEA

(Song from 'Chastelard')

(1865)

Between the sunset and the sea,
My love laid hands and lips on me;
Of sweet came sour, of day came night,
Of long desire came brief delight:
Ah love, and what thing came of thee
Between the sea-downs and the sea?

Between the sea-mark and the sea
Joy grew to grief, grief grew to me;
Love turned to tears, and tears to fire,
And dead delight to new desire;
Love's talk, love's touch there seemed to be
Between the sea-sand and the sea.

Between the sundown and the sea
Love watched one hour of love with me;
Then down the all-golden water-ways
His feet flew after yesterday's;
I saw them come and saw them flee
Between the sea-foam and the sea.

Between the sea-strand and the sea
Love fell on sleep, sleep fell on me;
The first star saw twain turn to one
Between the moonrise and the sun;
The next, that saw not love, saw me
Between the sea-banks and the sea.

THE GARDEN OF PROSERPINE

(From '*Poems and Ballads*' First series)

Here, where the world is quiet,
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot¹
In doubtful dreams of dreams;
I watch the green field growing
For reaping folk and sowing,²
For harvest time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams.³

I am tired of tears and laughter,
And men that laugh and weep
Of what may come hereafter⁴
For men that sow to reap:
I am weary of days and hours,
Blown buds of barren flowers,
Desires and dreams and powers
And everything but sleep.

Here life has death for neighbour
And far from eye or ear
Wan waves and wet winds labour,⁵
Weak ships and spirits steer;⁶

¹ Gioco di morti venti e di onde infrante.

² Per quelli che mietono e seminano.

³ Un mondo d'acque dormenti.

⁴ Di quello che possa accadere agli uomini.

⁵ Pallide onde e umidi venti s'affannano.

⁶ Vagano (navigano).

They drive adrift,¹ and whither
They wot not who make thither;²
But no such winds blow hither,
And no such things grow here.

No growth of moor or coppice,³
No heather-flower⁴ or vine,
But bloomless buds of poppies,
Green grapes of Proserpine,
Pale beds of blowing rushes⁵
Where no leaf blooms or blushes
Save this whereout she crushes⁶
For dead men deadly wine.

Pale, without name or number,
In fruitless fields of corn,
They bow themselves and slumber
All night till light is born;
And like a soul belated,⁷
In hell and heaven unmated,⁸
By cloud and mist abated⁹
Comes out of darkness morn.

¹ Vanno alla deriva.

² E non sanno chi ve li spinge.

³ Non erba di landa o di boscaglia.

⁴ Fiori d'ericca.

⁵ Di giunchi atterrati.

⁶ Stilla.

⁷ Dispersa.

⁸ Sola, senza compagna.

⁹ Offuscata.

Though one were strong as seven,
He too with death shall dwell,
Nor wake with wings in heaven,
Nor weep for pains in hell;
Though one were fair as roses,
His beauty clouds and closes;
And well though love reposes,
In the end it is not well.

Pale, beyond porch and portal,¹
Crowned with calm leaves,² she stands
Who gathers all things mortal
With cold immortal hands;
Her languid lips are sweeter
Than love's who fears to greet her
To men that mix and meet her
From many times and lands.

She waits for each and other,
She waits for all men born;
Forgets the earth her mother,
The life of fruits and corn;
And spring and seed and swallow
Take wing for her and follow³
Where summer song rings hollow⁴
And flowers are put to scorn.⁵

¹ Portico.

² Fronde severe.

³ Muovon le ali verso di lei e arrivano.

⁴ *To ring hollow* = echeggia invano.

⁵ Son disprezzati.

There go the loves that wither,
 The old loves with wearier wings;
 And all dead years draw thither ¹
 And all disastrous ² things;
 Dead dreams of days forsaken,
 Blind buds ³ that snows have shaken,
 Wild leaves that winds have taken,
 Red strays ⁴ of ruined springs.

We are not sure of sorrow,
 And joy was never sure;
 To-day will die to-morrow;
 Time stoops to no man's lure; ⁵
 And love, grown faint and fretful,
 With lips but half regretful ⁶
 Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
 Weeps that no loves endure.

From too much love of living,
 From hope and fear set free, ⁷
 We thank with brief thanksgiving ⁸
 Whatever gods may be
 That no life lives for ever;
 That dead men rise up never;
 That even the weariest river
 Winds somewhere safe to sea. ⁹

¹ Si trascinano qui.

² Funeste.

³ Boccioni chiusi.

⁴ Avanzi.

⁵ Il tempo non si ferma per lusinga d'uomo.

⁶ Che rimpiangono a metà.

⁷ Liberati.

⁸ Rendiamo brevi grazie.

⁹ Errando sbocca sicuro al mare.

Then star nor sun shall waken,¹
Nor any change² of light:
Nor sound of waters shaken,³
Nor any sound or sight:
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal⁴
Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night.

¹ Ci desteranno.

² Mutamento.

³ Fragore d'acque cadenti.

⁴ Di primavera.

GIORGIO MEREDITH

1828-1909

Giorgio Meredith, l'ultimo dei grandi romanzieri moderni, nacque a Petersfield nell'Hampshire, il 12 febbraio 1828. Suo padre abbandonò l'Inghilterra per recarsi a Cape Town nel Sud Africa, e mandò il fanciullo a compire la sua educazione in Germania dove rimase fino ai quindici anni. Tornato in Inghilterra seguì per qualche tempo gli studi universitari di legge che presto lasciò per dedicarsi alle lettere. A ventun'anno sposò la vedova Nicholls, figlia di Thomas Love Peacock, di nove anni maggiore di lui; ma il matrimonio fu tutt'altro che felice, e finì con una separazione. La prima poesia del Meredith fu pubblicata nel 1849 nel *Chamber's Journal*, e due anni dopo apparve un volume di *Poems* ove si sente assai l'influenza di Browning. Scrisse in prosa l'eccentrica fantasia *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856), tanto ammirata da George Eliot, e il breve racconto *Farina* ricordo delle sue impressioni giovanili di Germania. Ritornò alla poesia con la pubblicazione di *Modern Love* (1862) in cui s'adombra la storia del suo primo matrimonio, e che Swinburne chiama capolavoro di poesia psicologica.

Alternando le opere in versi con quelle in prosa, il Meredith apre la splendida serie dei suoi romanzi con *Richard Feverel* (1859) ricco di passi bellissimi, vivi di passione e di poesia, quali il delizioso idillio *Ferdinand and Miranda*; seguì *Emilia in England* ribattezzato poi *Sandra Belloni*, storia di una cantatrice italiana: due anni dopo diede in luce *Vittoria*,

che ricorda la lotta degli italiani contro l'Austria per la liberazione del lombardo-veneto di cui fu testimonio come corrispondente di guerra del *Morning Post*. *Harry Richmond* apparso per la prima volta nel *Cornhill Magazine* (1871), fu il primo dei suoi romanzi che incontrasse un relativo successo, essendosene vendute due edizioni in breve tempo. Nel 1879 mandò alle stampe *The Egoist* la più caratteristica delle sue opere, che alcuni ritengono il suo capolavoro. Vennero poi tre brevi romanzi, tre squisite miniature: *The House on the Beach*, *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper*, e *The Tale of Chloe*. Nel 1885 apparve *Diana of the Crossways* che rese popolare il Meredith, non perchè il gran pubblico riconoscesse finalmente il genio del romanziere, ma perchè l'eroina Diana Warwick era presa dalla vita reale, ritraendo la nepote di Sheridan, Carolina Norton che fu causa di un clamoroso scandalo nel mondo politico inglese. Il romanzo *One of our Conquerors* contiene più di tutti gli altri, specialmente nei primi capitoli, quelle condensazioni di pensiero, quel susseguirsi rapido di metafore, quello stile quasi epigrammatico, che gli fanno meritare veramente il nome di oscuro, il quale erroneamente è stato dato a tutta l'opera del Meredith. Negli ultimi suoi romanzi, *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) e *The Amazing Marriage* (1896), ritorna alla lucidità di pensiero e di stile che caratterizzano i suoi migliori lavori.

Meredith passò gran parte della sua vita a Flint Cottage, Box Hill, grazioso villino situato ai piedi di una collina tutta ricoperta di abeti. E in questo tranquillo ritiro, nel cuore del Surrey pittoresco, in mezzo alla vivente solitudine della natura il grande romanziere concepì e scrisse la vasta sua opera. Morì nel maggio del 1909.

L'opera di George Meredith rappresenta il pieno svolgimento della tradizione del romanzo inglese: egli adotta il macchinario dei grandi romanzieri suoi predecessori, ma lo mette in movimento per mezzo di una forza nuova. Mentre essi usarono il fervore morale, egli usa la filosofia: là dove essi s'affidavano al sentimento, egli chiama arbitra la ragione, e come il realismo morale di Fielding era una protesta contro

il sentimentalismo di Richardson, così la commedia filosofica di Meredith è una reazione contro l'atteggiamento sentimentale del romanzo popolare ai suoi giorni. Meredith è il primo grande romanziere che non sia stato popolare poichè i suoi romanzi non sono scritti per dar piacere ma per far pensare; egli vuol stimolare l'intelligenza, destare l'inaginazione del lettore non sfoggiando grandi effetti di luce o ricorrendo alle narrazioni dettagliate e minute, ma per mezzo della frase viva, incisiva, che illumina come un guizzar di lampo nella notte. In un passo di *Diana of the Crossways* egli ci spiega chiaramente la sua teoria e il suo metodo: 'The art of the pen (we write on darkness) is to rouse the inward vision, instead of labouring with a drop-scene brush, as if it were to the eye; because our flying minds cannot contain a protracted description. That is why the poets, who spring imagination with a word or a phrase, paint lasting pictures. The Shakespearean, the Dantesque, are in a line, two at most'. Meredith è un psicologo, un naturalista che sa e ci mostra tutti gli aspetti del cuore umano con profonda verità, tanto dal lato tragico come dal comico. Nella rivelazione del carattere femminile soprattutto egli è maestro, come dimostra la splendida galleria di ritratti di donne che vivono nei suoi romanzi: Renée, Diana Warwick, Clara Middleton, Mrs. Berry, la nutrice di Lucy Desboray, creazione che gareggia con la famosa nutrice del *Romeo e Giulietta* di Shakspeare.

A DISAPPOINTED LOVER

(From '*Diana of the Crossways*')

Dacier waited at the station, a good figure of a sentinel over his luggage and a spy¹ for one among the inpouring passengers. Tickets had been confidently taken, the private division of the carriages happily secured. On board the boat she would be veiled. Landed on French soil, they threw off disguises, breasted the facts.²

He smarted with his eagerness.

He had come well in advance of the appointed time, for he would not have had her hang about³ there one minute alone. Strange as this adventure was to a man of prominent station before the world, and electrical as the turning-point of a destiny that he was given to weigh deliberately and far-sightedly, Diana's image strung⁴ him to the pitch of it.⁵ He looked nowhere but ahead, like an archer putting hand for his arrow.

Presently he compared his watch and the terminus clock. She should now be arriving. He went out to meet her and do service. Many cabs and carriages were peered into, couples inspected, ladies and their maids, wives and husbands — an August exodus to the Continent.

Nowhere the starry she. But he had a fund of patience. She was now in some block of the streets. He was sure of her, sure of her courage. Tony⁶ and recreancy could

¹ In vedetta.

² Affrontato gli eventi.

³ Gironzare.

⁴ *To string* = tendere i nervi, eccitare.

⁵ Al massimo, al di là di ogni dire.

⁶ Nome della signora che Dacier stava aspettando.

not go together. Now that he called her Tony, she was his close comrade, known; the name was a caress and a promise, breathing of her, as the rose of sweetest earth. He counted it to be a month ere his family would have wind of the altered position of his affairs, possibly a year to the day of his making the dear woman his own in the eyes of the world. She was dear past computation, womanly, yet quite unlike the womanish women, unlike the semi-males, courteously called dashing, unlike the sentimental. His present passion for her lineaments declared her surpassingly beautiful, though his critical taste was rather for the white statue that gave no warmth. She had brains and ardour, she had grace and sweetness, a playful petulancy enlivening our atmosphere, and withal a refinement, a distinction, not to be classed; and justly might she dislike the being classed. Her humour was a perennial refreshment, a running well, that caught all the colours of light; her wit studded the heavens of the recollection of her. In his heart he felt that it was a stepping down for the brilliant woman to give him her hand; a condescension and an act of valour. She who always led or prompted when they conversed, had now in her generosity abandoned the lead and herself to him, and she deserved his utmost honouring.

But where was she? He looked at his watch, looked at the clock. They said the same: ten minutes to the moment of the train's departure.

PARTING ¹

(From '*Diana of the Crossways*' chap. xxxiv)

When she entered the room to Dacier and they touched hands, she rejoiced in her coolness; not to be unkind, not too kind: this was her task. She waited for the passage of commonplaces.²

— You slept well, Percy?

— Yes; and you?

— I don't think I even dreamed.

They sat. She noticed the cloud on him and waited for his allusion to it, anxious concerning him simply. Dacier flung the hair off his temples. Words of Titanic formation were hurling in his head at journals and journalists. He muttered his disgust at them.

— Is there anything to annoy you in the papers to day? — she asked, and thought how handsome his face was in anger. The paper of Mr. Tonans was named by him — you have not seen it?

— I have not opened it yet.

He sprang up. — The truth is, those fellows can now afford to buy right and left, corrupt every soul alive! There must have been a spy at the keyhole. I'm pretty certain — I could swear it was not breathed to any ear but mine; and there it is this morning in black and white.

¹ Diana, l'eroina del romanzo, promessa sposa a Dacier, ministro di gabinetto, in un momento di debolezza e stretta dal bisogno di danaro, rivela al direttore di un giornale di opposizione un segreto di stato confidatole dal fidanzato. Confessa il suo fallo a Dacier che, indignato, la lascia per sempre.

² Scambio delle solite cortesie, dei saluti.

— *What is?* cried Diana, turning to him on her chair.

— The thing I told you last night.

Her lips worked, as if to spell the thing. — Printed, do you say? she rose.

— Printed. In a leading article, loud as a trumpet; a hue and cry running from end to end of the country. And my Chief¹ has already had the satisfaction of seeing the secret he confided to me yesterday roared in all the throughfares this morning. They've got the facts: his decision to propose it, and the date — the whole of it! But who could have betrayed it?

For the first time since her midnight expedition she felt a sensation of the full weight of the deed. She heard thunder.

She tried to disperse the growing burden by an inward summons to contempt of the journalistic profession, but nothing would come. She tried to minimize it, and her brain succumbed. Her views of the deed last night and now throttled² reason in two contending clutches. The enormity swelled its dimensions, taking shape, and pointing magnetically at her. She stood absolutely, amazedly, bare before it.

— Is it of such very great importance? she said, like one supplicating him to lessen it.

— A secret of State? If you ask whether it is of great importance to me, relatively it is of course. Nothing greater. Personally my conscience is clear. I never mentioned it — couldn't have mentioned it — to any one but you. I'm not the man to blab³ secrets. He spoke to me because he knew he could trust me. To tell you the

¹ Il presidente del consiglio dei ministri.

² Stringevano.

³ Raccontare, discorrere senza discrezione.

truth, I'm brought to a dead stop.¹ I can't make a guess, I'm certain, from what he said, that he trusted me only with it: perfectly certain. I know him well. He was in his library, speaking in his usual conversational tone, deliberately not overloud. He stated that it was a secret between us.

— Will it affect him?

— This article? Why, naturally it will. You ask strange questions. A minister coming to a determination like that! It affects him vitally. The members of the Cabinet are not so devoted... It affects us all — the whole Party; may split it to pieces! There's no reckoning the upset right and left. If it were false, it could be refuted; we could despise it as a trick of journalism. It's true. There's the mischief. Tonans did not happen to call here last night? — absurd! I left later than twelve.

— No, but let me hear, — Diana said hurriedly, for the sake of uttering the veracious negative and to slur it over.² — Let me hear... She could not muster³ an idea.

Her delicious trilling⁴ voice was a comfort to him. He lifted his breast high and thumped⁵ it, trying to smile. — After all, it's pleasant being with you, Tony.

Give me your hand — you may: I'm bothered — confounded by this morning surprise. It was like walking against the muzzle of a loaded cannon suddenly unmasked. One can't fathom the mischief it will do. And I shall be suspected, and can't quite protest myself the spotless innocent. You won't give me your hand? Tony, you

¹ Non so che pensare.

² Mutar discorso.

³ Raccapazzare.

⁴ Penetrante, argentina.

⁵ E si battè il petto con forza.

might, seeing I am rather... A rush of scalding ¹ tears flooded her eyes.

— Don't touch me — she said, and forced her sight to look straight at him through the fiery shower. — I have done positive *mischief*?

— You, my dear Tony? He doated on ² her face. — I don't blame you, I blame myself. These things should never be breathed. Once in the air, the devil has hold of them. Don't take it so much to heart. The thing's bad enough to bear as it is. Tears! Let me have the hand. I came, on my honour, with the most honest intention to submit to your orders: but if I see you weeping in sympathy! — Oh! for heaven's sake, — she caught her hands away from him — don't be generous and don't touch me, — cried Diana. Do you understand? You did not name it as a secret. I did not imagine it to be a secret of immense, *immediate* importance.

— But — *what*? shouted Dacier stiffening. He wanted her positive meaning, as she perceived, having hoped that it was generally taken and current; ³ and the shock to him over.

— I had... I had not a suspicion of doing harm, Percy.

— But what harm have you done? No riddles! ⁴ His features gave sign of the break in their common ground, the widening gulf.

— I went... it was a curious giddiness: I can't account for it. I thought...

— *Went*? you went where?

¹ Cocenti, ardenti.

² Guardò con amore il suo viso.

³ Che parlasse in generale.

⁴ Niente enigmi!

— Last night. I would speak intelligibly: my mind has gone. Ah! you look. It is not so bad as my feeling.

— But where did you go last night? What! — to Tonans?

She drooped her head: she saw the track of her route cleaving the darkness in a demoniacal zig-zag and herself in demon's grip.⁴

— Yes, — she confronted him. — I went to Mr. Tonans.

— Why?

— I went to him —

— You went alone?

— I took my maid.

— Well?

— It was late when you left me...

— Speak plainly!

— I am trying: I will tell you all.

— At once, if you please.

— I went to him — why? There is no accounting for it. He sneered constantly at any stale information.

— You gave him constant information?

— No: in our ordinary talk. He railed at me for being 'out of it'. I must be childish: I went to show him — oh! my vanity! I think I must have been possessed. She watched the hardening of her lover's eyes. They penetrated, and through them she read herself insufferably. But it was with hesitation still that he said: — Then you betrayed me?

— Percy! I had not a suspicion of mischief.

— You went straight to this man?

— Not thinking...

— You sold me to a journalist!

⁴ Nella stretta del demonio.

— I thought it was a secret of a day. I don't think you — no, you did not tell me to keep it secret. A word from you would have been enough. I was in extremity.

Dacier threw his hands up and broke away.¹ He had an impulse to dash from the room, to get a breath of different air. He stood at the window, observing tradesmen's carts, housemaids, blank doors,² dogs, a beggar fifer.³ Her last words recurred to him. He turned: — You were in extremity, you said. What is the meaning of that? What extremity?

Her large dark eyes flashed powerlessly; her shape appeared to have narrowed; her tongue, too, was a feeble penitent.

— You ask a creature to recall her acts of insanity.

— There must be some signification in your words, I suppose.

— I will tell you as clearly as I can. You have the right to be my judge. I was in extremity — that is, I saw no means... I could not write: it was ruin coming.

— Ah? — you took payment for playing spy?

— I fancied I could retrieve...⁴ Now I see the folly, the baseness. I was blind.

— Then you sold me to a journalist for money? The intolerable scourge fetched a stifled scream⁵ from her and drove her pacing, but there was no escape; she returned to meet it.

The room was a cage to both of them, and every word of either was a sting...

¹ Si alzò.

² Porte aperte.

³ Pifferaro.

⁴ Riparare.

⁵ L'intollerabile tormento le fece emettere un grido soffocato.

— I have often wondered how your newspaper men got their information, — he said, and muttered:

— Money — women, — adding: — Idiots to prime them! And I one of the leaky vessels! Well, we learn. I have been rather astonished at times of late at the scraps of secret knowledge displayed by Tonans. If he flourishes his thousands! The wonder is, he doesn't corrupt the Ministers' wives. Perhaps he does. Marriage will become a danger-sign to Parliamentary members. Foreign women do these tricks... women of a well-known stamp. It is now a full year, I think, since I began to speak to you of secret matters — and congratulated myself, I recollect, on your thirst for them.

— Percy, if you suspect that I have uttered one word before last night, you are wrong. I cannot paint ¹ my temptation or my loss of sense last night. Previously I was blameless. I thirsted, yes; but in the hope of helping you.

He looked at her. She perceived how glitteringly loveless his eyes had grown. It was her punishment; and though the enamoured woman's heart protested it excessive, she accepted it.

— I can never trust you again — he said.

— I fear you will not — she replied.

His coming back to her after the departure of the guests last night shone on him in splendid colours of single-minded ² loverlike devotion. — I came to speak to my own heart. I thought it would give you pleasure; thought I could trust you utterly. I had not the slightest conception I was imperilling my honour!...

¹ Immaginare, rendermi ragione.

² Sincera, franca.

He stopped. Her bloodless fixed features revealed an intensity of anguish that checked him.

Only her mouth, a little open for the sharp breath, appeared dumbly beseeching. Her large eyes met his like steel to steel, as of one who would die fronting the weapon.

He strangled a loathsome inclination to admire.

— So good-bye, he said.

She moved her lips.

He said no more. In half a minute he was gone. To her it was the plucking of life out of her breast. She pressed her hands where heart had been. The pallor and cold of death took her body.

CLARA

(From '*The Egoist*')
7

Clara came along chatting and laughing with Colonel de Craye, young Crossjay's hand under one of her arms, and her parasol flashing;...¹ really insufferably fair: perfect in height and grace of movement; exquisitely-tressed; red-lipped, the colour striking out² to a distance from her ivory skin: a sight to set the woodland dancing,³ and turn the heads of the town; though beautiful a jury of art-critics might pronounce her not to be. Irregular features are condemned in beauty. Beautiful figure, they could say. A description of her figure and her walking would have won her any praises: and she wore a dress cunning to embrace the shape and flutter loose about

¹ Scintillante (al sole).

² Irradiando.

³ Da far gioire le selve.

it, in the spirit of a summer's day...¹ See the silver birch in a breeze: here it swells, there it scatters, and it is puffed to a round, and it streams like a pennon, and now gives the glimpse and shine of the white stem's line within, now hurries over it,² denying that it was visible, with a chatter along the sweeping folds,³ while still the white peeps through. She had the wonderful art of dressing to suit the season and the sky. To-day the art was ravishingly companionable⁴ with her sweet-lighted face: too sweet, too vividly-meaningful⁵ for pretty, if not of the strict severity for beautiful.⁶ Millinery⁷ would tell us that she wore a fichu of thin white muslin crossed in front on a dress of the same light stuff, trimmed with deep rose. She carried a grey-silk parasol, traced at the borders with green creepers, and across the arm devoted to Crossjay, a length of trailing ivy, and in that hand a bunch of the first long grasses.

LUCY

(From '*Richard Feverel*' chap. xiv)

Above green-flashing plunges of a weir,⁸ and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet⁹

Cio è come gli alberi son rivestiti dalle foglie nell'estate.

² Poi la nasconde rapido.

³ Con un sussurro lungo le ondegianti pieghe.

⁴ Si accompagnava mirabilmente.

⁵ Troppo intensamente espressivo.

⁶ Se pur non aveva la severa austerità per esser bello.

⁷ Cioè una modista.

⁸ Cascade di una cateratta.

⁹ Spirea (arbusto).

hung from the banks thick with weed¹ and trailing bramble,² and there also hung a daughter of earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim, that left her lips and chin in the sun, and, sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting the season. On a closer inspection you might see that her lips were stained. The blooming young person was regaling on dewberries.³ They grew between the bank and the water. Apparently she found the fruit abundant, for her hand was making pretty progress to her mouth. Fastidious youth, which revolts at woman plumping her exquisite proportions on bread-and-butter, and would (we must suppose) joyfully have her scraggy⁴ to have her poetical, can hardly object to dewberries. Indeed the act of eating them is dainty and induces musing. The dewberry is a sister to the lotus, and an innocent sister. You eat: mouth, eye, and hand are occupied, and the mind free to roam. And so it was with the damsel who knelt there. The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue: from a dewy copse⁵ dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note: the kingfisher⁶ flashed emerald out of green osiers:⁷ a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking

¹ Erbe lunghe.

² Ro'vo, spino.

³ Stava mangiando allegramente delle more.

⁴ Magra.

⁵ Boschetto.

⁶ Tordo.

⁷ Giunchi, salici.

solitude: a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth; and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weirfall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles,¹ and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds. Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for the weir, he dared not dip a scull.² Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes. He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what it sought. A stroke from his right brought him beside her. The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink. Richard sprang from his boat into the water. Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF GERMANY

(From '*Harry Richmond*' chaps. xiv, xv)

In the gloom of the diligence, packed between Germans of a size that not even Tacitus had prepared me for, smoked over from all sides.. What we heard sounded

¹ Si voltò per misurar la distanza dai pilastri della cateratta.

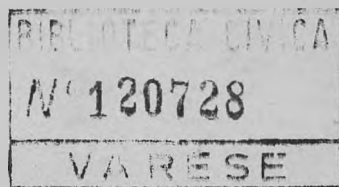
² Remo.

like a language of the rocks and caves, and roots plucked up, a language of gluttons feasting; the word *ja* was like a door always on the hinge of every mouth.

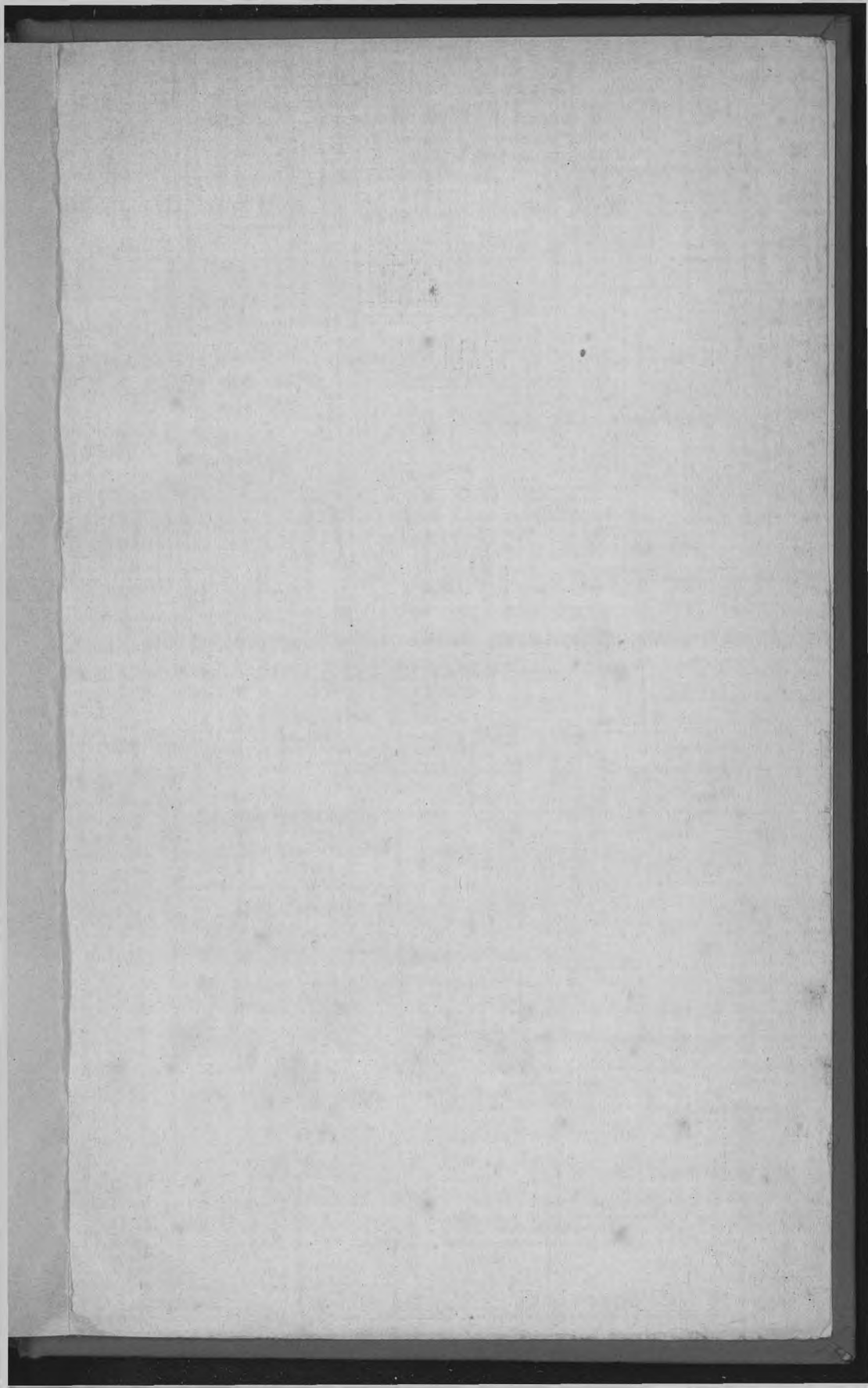
THE FIRST SONG OF NIGHTINGALES

(From '*Sandra Belloni*' chap. LVI)

When she was in her bedroom at night, she threw up her window. April was leaning close upon May, and she had not to wait long before a dusky flutter of low notes, appearing to issue from the great rhododendron bank across the lawn, surprised her. She listened, and another little beginning was heard, timorous, shy, and full of mystery for her. The moon hung over branches, some that showed young buds, some still bare. Presently the long, rich, single notes cut the air, and melted to their glad delicious chuckle. The singer was answered from a farther bough, and again from one. It grew to be a circle of melody round Emilia at the open window.



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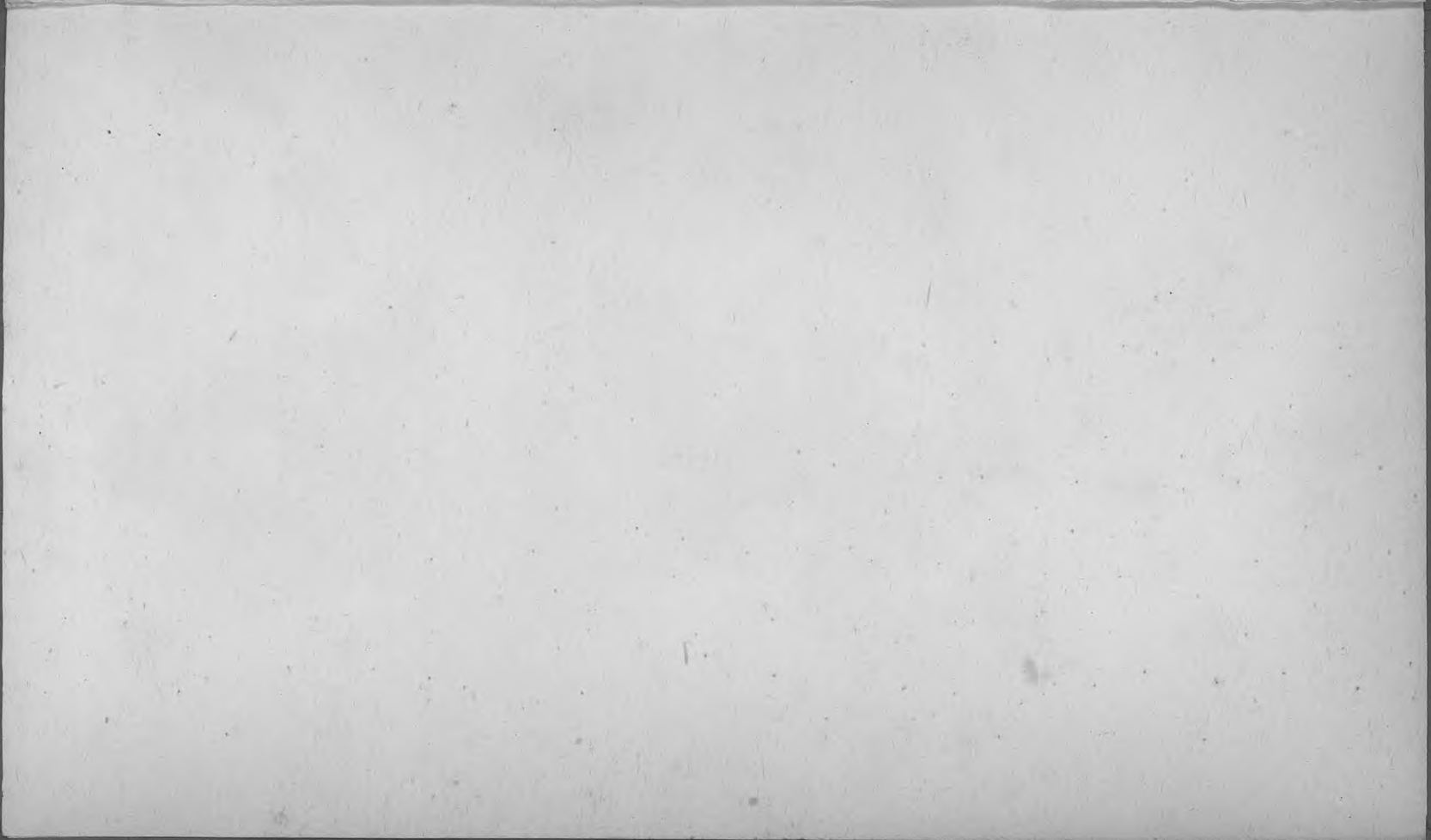
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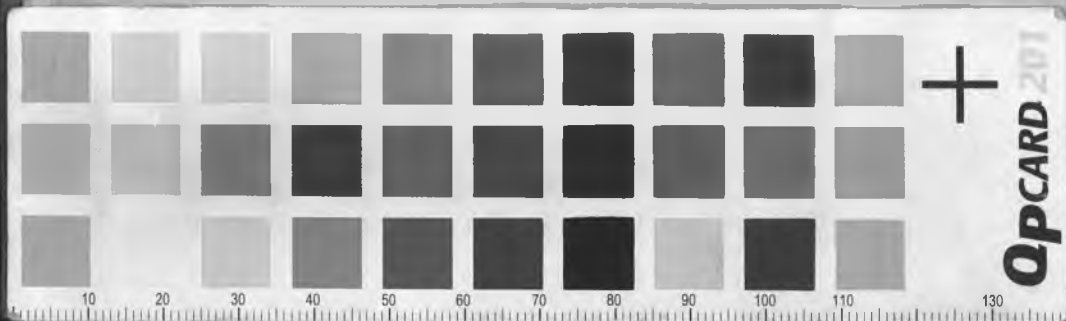
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